

The Post-Colonial 'Nation-Building' Novel.

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Declaration.

I declare that the composition and contents of this thesis are entirely my own.

Signed:

(Rajorshi Chakraborti).

Dedication.

To my grandmothers, both of whom passed away while I was here working on this thesis, but who would have been very happy to see its completion, and to my parents, to whom I owe everything.

Abstract for Thesis Examining 'The Post-Colonial 'Nation-Building' Novel'.

This is a 'novelistic' study, that, among and through its other objectives, will attempt to demonstrate how such a characterisation in no way excludes an engaged examination of history, politics, society, culture, ideologies etc.--- i.e. the multiple 'worldedness' of human existence. We argue, on the contrary, that the inclusion of such dimensions is absolutely fundamental to the writing and interpreting of novels. By 'novelistic' we understand, and will establish in our first chapter, a mode of interrogation of human being-in-the-world that is ontologically oriented and epistemologically equipped, in a manner unique among discursive practices, towards evoking (repeatedly and diversely) the sheer fullness of existence itself.

Thereafter our major objective will be to demonstrate these propositions in practice; in showing how post-colonial novels in India and Africa have collectively subjected the processes of post-independence national becoming in their societies to uniquely exhaustive examinations, precisely by utilising both the novel's singularly comprehensive discursive capacities as well as its radically flexible formal potential for alternative re-inscriptions. We establish how various novels have dissolved together in simultaneous, dynamic performance the spectrum of disparate locations, processes, selves, conflicts, and structures that national becoming involves. But a later chapter will also examine how some post-colonial novels articulate heterogeneously-premised and directed trajectories of self-conception and community, thereby envisioning paradigms and histories that inevitably engage with but do not require the horizons of nationalist discourses for their validation. This last possibility also applies to the narratives about and by the women in these societies: another chapter focuses on fictions examining various aspects of their particular relationships to their national histories, as well as the distinct dimensions of their

lives that are influenced but refuse to be subsumed by the nation's structures and categories.

My study throughout will engage with the writings of historians and theorists of various nationalisms, as well as literary/cultural critics and theorists of the novel, but my thesis will always attempt to prove its premise--- that one of the qualities most valuable about fiction is that it can interrogate such themes not only in abstraction or in specialised separation, but rather by evoking their interactive, simultaneous fullness; thereby realising the possibility of discursive engagements that illustrate and examine, but also extend, enrich and challenge such theoretical or specialised formulations through their comprehensive performances. All of this will be refocussed in the conclusion to establish the depth, breadth and detail of 'worlded' involvement evident in the African and Indian novel's examinations of their post-independence histories, and examine some of their verdicts with reference to questions of post-colonial nationhood, history and the processes of fictionalising itself in such contexts.

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Section (1): Words and Worlds: The Discursive Uniqueness of the Novel.¹

What follows is a literary study that, among and through its other objectives, will attempt to demonstrate how such a characterisation in no way excludes an examination of history, politics, society, culture, ideas, economics etc.--- in a word, the world. On the contrary, it argues that the inclusion of such dimensions is absolutely fundamental to the writing of novels, and thereby to our analysis of them, and that this inclusive capacity is intrinsically part of what makes them existentially relevant. We will show how stories are always, already necessarily 'worlded' from within, and that therefore it is possible to remain 'inside' a literary discussion and never abandon discussing other aspects of human existence at the same time. One of the stated aims of this study is to demonstrate that post-colonial novels in Africa and India have subjected the processes of post-independence national becoming in these societies to uniquely exhaustive existential examinations, precisely because novels have singularly comprehensive, dynamic, and multivalent containing capacities when it comes to narrating trajectories of human beings-in-their-worlds. Yet another primary underlying objective, performed through the overt themes and pre-occupations of this thesis, is to re-argue the relevance of reading and making fictions, by attempting to rejoin a theoretical rift that has opened up within much criticism in the last few decades: between discussions of literature and its thoroughly implicated, interactive relationship with the rest of life, between talking about literary words and the worlds they arise from and describe, as if we (can) only do one or the other at a given time, as if we have to choose.

This is a study conceived of as 'novelistic' and is primarily about novels, and their possibilities and limits as discursive forms. By 'novelistic' we understand, and will

¹ Please note that footnotes are sequenced by sections rather than by chapters. Thus each new section inaugurates another sequence.

establish through our initial arguments, a mode of interrogation of human being-in-the-world that is ontologically oriented, in a manner unique among discursive practices, to nothing as much as the sheer fullness of existence itself. Our major effort in this study will be to examine the 'post-colonial' novel and its attempts to narrate the 'post-colonial' nation in what we believe are singularly engaged and exhaustive ways. Yet, to establish that, such a thesis will first have to demonstrate more generally these distinct containing capacities we claim for fiction, of its being able to dissolve and co-perform in narrative diverse stories, themes, and worlds simultaneously.

This first section therefore is divided into two chapters that are to be treated together as introductory. They are kept separate so that the progress of the argument may be followed clearly. This first chapter, primarily through the examples from Calvino, Joyce, and Kafka, begins to enunciate our sense of fiction's particular capacities: its singular ontology and epistemology when it comes to narrating uniquely inclusive and dynamic portrayals of the fullness of human existence. Using the work of thinkers (and practitioners) such as Milan Kundera, Saul Bellow, Edward Said and Mikhail Bakhtin, it will lead us to some general conclusions regarding the ways in which novels perform their narratives, as well as how this might alter our reception of them as critical readers. In both cases, we will end by arguing, there is an especially comprehensive and implicit, but also open and revisable, relationship in novels between their words and the worlds being read or written about. The second chapter, which inaugurates our particular focus on post-colonial issues, will begin by considering some recent critiques of the history of the European novel as well as of the very activity of fictionalising itself. It will relate questions of composing novels with allegations of participating in a manner of 'narrative imperialism', and debate the power relations--- and the exclusions and misrepresentations--- that make each of these practices possible. Building on a response to such critiques through the earlier foundational work, the conclusion of this introductory section will focus on our primary endeavour, that of enunciating how

novels may narrate the fullness of a nation's life in uniquely revelatory ways, and thereby asking what the post-colonial 'nation-building' utility of fiction's particular capacities may be.

Chapter (1) Words and their Worlds: The Performance and Reading of Fictions.

How a Story Works: An Instance.

In Calvino's novel-fable *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo and the Great Khan reach a point in their conversation where the latter cannot concentrate any more on the chess match they are playing:

It was the game's reason that eluded him [...]. What were the real stakes? At checkmate, beneath the foot of the king, knocked aside by the winner's hand, nothingness remains: a black square, or a white one. By disembodiment his conquests to reduce them to the essential, Kublai had arrived at the extreme operation: the definitive conquest, of which [his] empire's multiform treasures were only illusory envelopes; it was reduced to a square of planed wood (1997, 131).

But he is not in this mood for long when Marco Polo, who has been telling him stories all night of the cities he has visited in the Khan's realm--- cities the Khan himself knows nothing about even though they are supposedly his possessions--- begins to speak again:

Your chessboard, Sire, is inlaid with two woods: ebony and maple. The square on which your enlightened gaze is fixed was cut from the ring of a trunk that grew in a year of drought: you see how its fibres are arranged. Here a barely hinted knot can be made out: a bud tried to burgeon on a premature spring day, but the night's frost forced it to desist (131).

Extrapolating from that same square, Marco Polo goes on to speak of caterpillar's nests that caused the tree to be chopped down, of wood carvers, "ebony forests, about rafts laden with logs that come down the rivers, of docks, of women at the windows, [...] gradually overwhelming the Khan with "the quantity of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood" (132).

The Novel as Unique: a) Its Ontological Orientation Towards Fullness.

To begin then, as the parable above performs, any detail (such as a chessboard square) within a fiction can allow a narrator to leap off into further storytelling that is at least potentially endless. Marco Polo's tale moves seamlessly from a whorl in the chessboard's wood to talking of seasons, plant and insect life, and then onto the lives of woodcarving men and women by a riverside, thus narrating an existential continuum in which they are all dynamically embodied. The great Khan's weary contemplation of a philosophical nothingness is revealed to be as superficial as his illusion of possession-by-conquest, when the lives he supposedly rules over are transformed by Polo's fictions into a vertiginous demonstration of infinite, irrepressible fullness. Yet Calvino's fable is also a performance of the ontological possibilities of fictionalising itself. Here the simplest kind of storytelling displays a special suppleness in how it can carry together textures of the endlessly inter-connected becomings of beings (and things) in the world. This to us constitutes a unique capacity for formal flexibility, where any kind of content narrated in any order and from any perspective can fill out with its own shape, flux and language the novel form. Perhaps its very name indicates this openness to novelty, to the seamless, simultaneous, metamorphic multi-valence of anything that exists in its 'meanings' and connections. Bakhtin theorises that "a new zone [is thereby] opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely, the zone of maximal contact with the present [...] in all its openendedness" (1996, 11). This thesis will argue that fiction is the only discursive form ontologically able to achieve such a dynamic evocation of existential fullness, which makes it fundamentally distinct from intellectual disciplines whose hermeneutics are based on principles of abstraction and/or specialisation. And it is this capacity that (we shall demonstrate) allows each novel to contain some of the diverse locations, dimensions, structures, conflicts, agents, and processes that collectively constitute the becomings of nations.

If such a category could even apply here, ‘truth’ for fiction is simply and entirely all that has to do with being human, just by virtue of its existence--- including all that could be, all that is conceivable, imaginable, expressible. The limits of an individual narrator’s language, interest, and imagination are the only limits of any particular fiction. Milan Kundera writes that the novel “examines not reality but existence”:

And existence is not what has occurred, existence is the realm of human possibilities, everything that man can become, everything he’s capable of. Novelists draw up the map of existence by discovering this or that human possibility. (1990, 42).

Uncovering new dimensions to existence is what he deems the novel’s “only morality”. Thus for instance, madness, dreams, lies, hallucinations, delusions all qualify under the universal eligibility to be fictionalised, just because they are all elements of human existence. Within the pages of a novel, anybody can be a narrator, and anything his or her subject. The first thing Oskar Matzerath, the narrator of Gunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, confesses is that he is writing from inside a mental asylum. This revelation immediately situates and relativises his particular narrative, but in no way discredits its validity, its right to be a narrative. If something is, it is of interest to fiction, because anything that exists (or might exist, or exists merely in conception) comes suffused with the ‘truth’ that it *is*, and thereby with the truth of its being a partial but inter-animating dimension of everything else human. Novels propose that everything humanly conceivable might be relevant to understanding human performance; that everything human serves as existential illustration and needs to be taken into narrative account. A founding premise of this study is that only fiction seems flexible enough to deal discursively with the implications of this simple yet anarchic proposition, because of its formal capacities to contain disparate versions of the ceaselessly dynamic and inter-related continuums that together constitute the performance of existence.² Citing

² Perhaps poetry has the same flexibility to a more limited degree, limited first because of size: most novels are simply larger and can encompass more strands, dimensions, processes and events from out of the fullness of human becoming. Another related point is that poems are often less ‘internally dialogised’ or ‘polyphonic’ in Bakhtinian terms: i.e. a single poem rarely contains as many autonomous voices, trajectories and conflicts as a novel can, and can therefore rarely evoke social

novels such as Hermann Broch's *The Sleepwalkers* and his own *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* as examples, Kundera characterises the novel form as "polyphonic" for its "extraordinary powers of incorporation". "Whereas neither poetry nor philosophy can incorporate the novel, the novel can incorporate both poetry and philosophy without losing thereby anything of its identity" (1996, 64). For Kundera, such plasticity of form and openness to diverse content allows fiction to be "polyhistorical", which means "marshalling all intellectual means and all poetic forms to illuminate 'what the novel alone can discover': man's being" (64):

A novel is a long piece of synthetic prose based on play with invented characters. By the term synthetic I have in mind the novelist's desire to grasp his subject from all sides and in the fullest possible completeness. Ironical essay, novelistic narrative, autobiographical fragment, historic fact, flight of fantasy: the synthetic power of a novel is capable of combining everything into a unified whole like the voices of polyphonic music (New York Times, 30-11-80).

For the novel, such flexibility does not arise out of any recent philosophical or theoretical re-orientations. It has always been implicitly necessary in order for such a discursive form to have any chance of performing some of the infinite 'polyphony' of existence itself. "The novelist doesn't set up as a scholar, a doctor, a sociologist, a historian, he analyses *human situations* that are not part of some scientific field but are simply part of life" (Kundera, 1996, 165). Thus, in fiction, "*everything becomes theme (existential questioning)*" (165). Such an ontological pursuit of fullness is what Kundera considers the essence of fictional 'prose', which he defines as "not only a form of discourse distinct from verse", but as "an aspect of reality" itself, "its daily, concrete, momentary aspect, and the opposite of myth":

portraits as multi-layered and dynamic. (Even in exceptions such as *The Waste Land*, the various voices, fragments and narratives are subsumed finally under one narratorial 'over-voice'). Yet a fuller discussion of the differing premises and practices of these genres is beyond the scope of our present argument. Mikhail Bakhtin, for one, takes such a line of discussion much further. See *The Dialogic Imagination* (1996, 285-286 & 296-298).

This goes to the deepest conviction of every novelist: there is nothing so thoroughly disguised as the prose of life. [...] If the novel is an art and not merely a 'literary genre', the reason is that the discovery of prose is its *ontological mission*, which no art but the novel can take on entirely. (1996, 132-33).

For fiction, existence is the great given, the only absolute, the grand narrative that is the Heideggerian ground for everything else: (an inaccurate formulation: existence *is* 'everything else'). Its limits and extents are unspeakable, as is its opposite (we cannot call 'non-existence' into conception: 'nothing' once spoken is not 'nothing' any more). Existence is the only 'text' there is no getting outside of, the founding non-fiction, that there is everything rather than nothing. Nothing we say can ever encompass existence, separate us from it or transcend it. Existence is everything that is, immersed inextricably together, every element, process and dimension dissolved in dynamic disguise with numerous others.³ We will take up by the end of the next chapter

³ Perhaps this is the point at which to clarify our position vis-à-vis certain philosophical projects whose concerns bear some relationship with our own: as for instance with the work of Heidegger and Deleuze. While I acknowledge that Heidegger has been an awakening influence in ways not always possible to mark by citations, this study situates itself in an ontologically different space from his work--- i.e. within the novel as opposed to philosophy. Thus, despite the apparent resemblances of our objectives--- both of which seek to establish an epistemological practice that is founded upon the entire fullness of being-in-the-world--- we will proceed on different discursive terrain defined by distinct hermeneutic horizons. For similar reasons we acknowledge but do not pursue further any analogies with Deleuzian "transcendental empiricism", which is again premised and developed philosophically upon the fact of human immersion within unrelentingly multiple and interactive planes of becoming. Yet, beyond indicating a certain comparability of aims, we must clarify that we do not actually '*borrow*' either our ontology or our methods from any such body of philosophical thought, and hence will not be able to treat them with the argumentative thoroughness that they merit. On the contrary, the work of this first chapter will make clear that that we derive our interpretative premises and critical strategies solely from the nature of novelistic discourse itself, and also why this is integral to our critical project.

In this thesis, it is fundamentally a 'novelistic criticism' that we are seeking to articulate and practice. Therefore, while we will continue to indicate and examine throughout any relevant points of contact with ideas and approaches from diverse intellectual disciplines (indeed, it will become clearer presently how establishing such relationships is vital to our project), a more extended exploration of individual comparisons between these different modes of working is neither directly relevant nor always possible within the bounds of our present purposes.

But for those interested in pursuing such issues further, Heidegger's *Being and Time* and *What is Philosophy* and *A Thousand Plateaus...* by Deleuze and Guattari would form obvious starting points. Deleuze and Guattari devote a chapter of *What is Philosophy* to articulating their vision of 'planes of immanence' (1994, 35-60) upon which they premise their interpretative approach of 'transcendental empiricism', while *A Thousand Plateaus...* (1988) in its entirety might be regarded as the actual practice of such a 'method'.

questions regarding the post-colonial nation-building utility of a discursive form which can perform such a conception of the fullness of existence for its own sake, but for now we continue investigating how the novel realises this ontological potential through its distinct epistemologies, and what gives fiction this particular plasticity that we claim for it before the fullness of human Being.

The Novel as Unique: b) Selves as Epistemologies.

Selves are the novel's distinct currency, its uniquely formulated units of discussion and discovery. If exploring existential fullness is implicitly part of the novel's ontology, narrating through selves is its particular mode of epistemology. The stories of selves immersed in specific situations (in times, places, bodies, cultures, politics, languages) are the very basis of the novel's methods. Kundera reminds us: "but again, to exist means: 'being-in-the-world'. Thus both the character and his world must be understood as possibilities" (1990, 42). What are selves, the novel asks, and how are we to interpret these beings in bodies in worlds? Kundera defines his Heideggerian sense of our 'always, already' thrown-ness into our worlds:

Man does not relate to the world as subject to object, as eye to painting; not even as actor to stage set. Man and the world are bound together like the snail to its shell: the world is part of man, it is his dimension, and as the world changes, existence (being-in-the-world) changes as well (1990, 35).

And if man is always, already 'worlded', so is any story relating to him. There can be no discussion epistemologically based on selves that is not simultaneously examining those particular worlds they come inextricably embodied in. It is in such attempts to narrate the fullness of individual beings-in-their-world that the novelistic text comes necessarily to be 'worlded' from within (which was the assertion we began with, and whose full consequences we will examine later). Thus, through this singular conjunction of ontological orientation and means of narrating, the novel can explore in

singularly exhaustive ways the relentlessly dynamic interaction of human beings with the various determinants of their worlds--- systems, structures, histories, ideologies, other selves--- always asking how we are to interpret selfhood as memory and matter, bodies and discourses at the same time? Fiction is uniquely poised discursively to contain comprehensive performances of how human becomings unfold in disparate spaces and times, with the seamless impinging of diverse pasts (inter-personal, physical, historical, cultural) that are present all together, variously interpretable in their inter-related implications. And most of all it pushes the limits of the question: how and how much of all this can be rendered communicable in language?

'Always, Already Worlded': A Performance of Selves, Worlds, and Their Thorough Interactivity in *Ulysses*.

To consider just one instance, Joyce's novel *Ulysses* finds Bloom's 'self' to be a performance site that contains disparate combinations of existential elements and dimensions just in its daily living. He describes Bloom's being-in-the-world as a ceaselessly interactive continuum so that his narrative collapses various binaries in its complete solubility: between 'inner' and 'outer' lives, body and consciousness, individual, familial, racial and national histories, between 'being' and 'becoming', reality and myth, hallucination and appearance, memory and the present, action and thought. Form and content are inseparably interwoven, as when the novel simultaneously uncovers how many modes of being dissolve together in the performance of one human moment, and what varieties of language may be employed to evoke them? Such is the trajectory that Joyce's novel travels, and in performing its route extends its exploration with 'organic' narrative logic to any level of human inquiry that he can force language to express.

Yet the book evokes not only the relentless interactivity between Bloom-in-his-world and his endlessly streaming 'inner life', but also the interrelated dynamic extent of that world around him. Joyce includes events and exchanges between other Dubliners on the streets on the same afternoon, in the pub and in the library where Bloom is not even present, and 'inside' the consciousnesses of Molly and Stephen, thus filling out a history of a Dublin day with human becomings at various levels and locations, a spatial evocation of the inter-connected inhabiting of a certain time in a town narrated all together. We will develop later the idea that this is an example of exactly the sort of comprehensive 'nation-building' (as well as its simultaneous deconstruction) only novelistic examination can achieve, because of its unique capacity to narrate the dynamics of human existence at various levels and locations simultaneously. *Ulysses* asks what selfhood is when held up to history, when it is seen as being relentlessly in

history: selfhood as the convergence and performance site of diverse histories. It reformulates thereby in a singularly exhaustive way Tolstoy's question from *War and Peace* about what history itself might be (which we shall consider in the next section)---as to whether everything human on every level is to be interpreted as entering into and shaping history? Should history be considered a synonym for the dynamic all-soluble fullness of human existence, and how might that be novelised? The novel (and the post-colonial novel of national interrogation is only a specifically focussed instance of this) is a discursive form uniquely able to investigate the implications of such a conception, because of how it looks for interactive selves immersed in their worlds and investigates most fully the extents of that involvement.

The Novel as Unique: c) Narrative Limits and Existential Inexhaustibility.

Yet a caveat important to establish at the very outset is that however ontologically orientated towards fullness we might argue the novel to be, this is emphatically never to be equated with any claim for either omniscience or finality. The limits of Marco Polo's narrative above are his memory, his breath, his prejudices and preferences, and his eye on Khan's interest. Yet the dimensions that he does narrate evoke so many others that he leaves untold; and each could be as seamlessly included in someone else's re-telling, and seen to be as inter-animating, illustrative, and relevant as the few things that Polo selects to speak of. But fiction allows Marco Polo to juxtapose events and details in any sequence he chooses and just commence his narrating without requiring plinth, preamble or proof: *his* conception of the continuum is the only validity his narrative requires. Anybody who disagrees with his order or his omissions can tell another story, no less limited, no less valid. This capacity for experimental re-inscription we posit as another of fiction's unique distinctions: the implicit acknowledgement of its own limits and specificities that (even when revealed and explored as an epistemological crisis) can then logically demand alternative retellings.

Even a novel as exhaustive and ambitious as *Ulysses* about a day as circumscribed as Bloom's--- with its efforts to create language for the minute metamorphoses of his every moment--- can only select certain episodes, particular trains of thought and not others, and be suffused with the irony of evoking all that it cannot include through the very richness of all that it does. Each fiction, even the most apparently capacious, demonstrates through the very arrangements of exclusion and selection that lead to one story being told out of numerous others, as well as the endless re-interpretability of even that single story, that it is impossible to contain or express the fullness of what a self does with its time, and all that time does with it, even on a single day.⁴ Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* wonders if to swallow just one life whole, one has to swallow the world entire. (And who but God (and possibly Hegel) has unerring access to the becomings of every being throughout all of time, to be able to arrange the infinitely interpretable implications of their activities and interactions, and thereby tell us with certainty what it is all finally leading towards)? But existential inexhaustibility such as the novel uncovers has no transcendental or religious conceptions at its basis, nor does it claim to omnisciently reveal the ultimate aims of History. Lukacs in his *Theory of the Novel* notes this ontological capacity for 'irony'--- which is how fiction foregrounds, internalises, and survives the inevitable boundaries defining all expression:

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God (1999, 88). [...] Irony, the self-surmounting of a subjectivity that has gone as far as it was possible to go, is the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God (93). [...] This is why irony is the objectivity of the novel (90).

By being a set of stories about specific selves in specific times and places, a novel always foregrounds and insists on human immersion: that selves only exist involved in the rest of existence, never above, never beyond it. They can only speak bounded and constructed by the contexts of their various immersions (though, as we shall see, this fact is not at all to be understood deterministically). Yet it implies that any utterance is

⁴ Henry James describes the problem as well as the illusion of resolving it: "really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so [...]" (1984, 1041).

necessarily partial, relative, derivative, one of many possible versions--- a fiction endlessly alterable. These limits come embodied in any particular narrative, but these same pervasive limits become the source of a resulting liberation (in a way analogous to the release of re-readings by deconstruction because of the potentially endless surplus of meanings generated by language). And these inevitable limits are what allow (and demand) the emergence of new stories, alternative re-interpretations and re-inscriptions, because no one reader or narrator can ever claim fullness or finality. If we can all tell only partial stories, we can all disagree and revise other stories. Moreover it gives everyone a potentially equal right to tell stories. In *The Tin Drum* Oskar Matzerath does not need to conceal that he might not be mentally stable. That immediately becomes part of his particular 'worldedness'; his circumstances are intrinsic to his story. This makes the novel an exceptionally democratic area of discourse: any number of rewritten Bloomsdays, for example, are novelistically conceivable, in various voices and modes of narrative, ranging from the Hemingwayesque to the Joycean.

Fiction is as limited and partial therefore as anything else human; yet in its insistent attention to specificity, it could be said to acknowledge openly and confront the implications of such a provenance, unlike so much of the history of theory and philosophy, which pretended exactly the opposite in claiming to be objective, timeless and universally relevant. For ever so long, post-Platonic philosophy contrived to sustain in its self-image and its categories the illusions of being bodiless, placeless, selfless, changeless and transcendently limitless, somehow free of every human limit and attribute.

My thesis will thus proceed on these premises, which it will try to prove all the time in its critical practice. To summarise where we have arrived, the novel's particular terms of conducting human discovery, of uncovering beings-in-worlds, allow it dimensions of

discussion fuller than other disciplines, more grounded, better suited to narrate our existence as it is actually inhabited--- inextricably and variously immersed, always embodied and situated, and yet dynamic and endlessly interpretable.⁵ The novel's narrative epistemology is necessarily more honest because it takes as the basis of any performance the implicit acknowledgement of its subjective limits (i.e. it is no more than a single story of limited people inhabiting certain locations and processes of the world). And yet a novelistic narrative is necessarily fuller because it is precisely this orientation of subject that opens for the form an opportunity to realise its distinct ontology, by allowing it to evolve organically the potentially limitless breadths and depths of its enquiry. Following a self through a story, as we see with Joyce tracking Bloom, could imply dissolving in performance any number of existential dimensions, no matter how incompatible and in the most incongruous order, just because the self in question does. Because whatever occurs on any level of human existence, is narratively relevant to the novel. And finally, if the novel is concerned ontologically with the fullness of existence which yet remains forever beyond encompassing, since any single narrative perspective is revealed to be inevitably particular and limited, then anyone's story is allowable, and any subject or voice that he or she chooses. In *Ulysses*, detailing the fullness of just one self on a single day is revealed to be finally impossible, even after the contents of his bookcase, his fantasies, and his bills have been exhaustively represented. Thus, even in the largest and most ambitious of novels, humility (for both reader and writer) becomes not the opposite of narrative ambition but its implicitly realised destination. The capacity to contain, survive, and thrive off this unique and paradoxical conjunction is what Lukacs admires when he calls the novel the "art-form of mature virility" (1999, 71), since it confronts the inexpressible fullness of being as its very basis:

⁵ Again, the analogy to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of existence (and any possibility of expression) always occurring within various interactive 'planes of immanence' is apparent, but we hope by now it is clear that we have arrived at such a formulation differently--- not 'philosophically' in the same sense as them or Heidegger (i.e. by arguing against the assumptions and methods of earlier philosophy), but from the nature of novelistic discourse itself.

Time is the fullness of living, although the fullness of time is the self-abolition of life, and with it, of time itself (123). [...] That is why only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time--- Bergson's *duree*, among its constitutive principles (121).

These singularities of ontology and epistemology are what allow the novel narrative capacity that we have found lacking in more specialised, generalised or abstract-theoretical discussions of history and nationhood, such as are available in cultural theory, philosophy, politics, and sociology. This is not at all intended as a summary denial of the validity of the methods or conclusions of such disciplines. On the contrary, throughout its course this study will utilise formulations, historiographies and theories of post-colonial nationhood as reference points to set among its readings of fictions. Yet we will argue, and will begin by demonstrating immediately below, that the novel can put all such *separately* detected versions and dimensions--- political, socio-economic, historical, anthropological--- to a fuller kind of narrative and interpretative experiment, by dissolving them in simultaneous interactive performance with each other to explore the metamorphic proportions of their presence in the fullness of social life. Exploring the implications of this unique discursive potential for the narratives of post-colonial nation-building will constitute the body of my study, but first we wish to develop these general propositions further, of the novel's particular capacity to narrate 'worldedness' and what reading possibilities they can release for us as 'literary' critics.

d) How Existence is Irreducible to Ideas: An Instance from *The Trial*.

At the heart of Joseph K.'s all-pervasive struggle with the Court (and its procedures and functionaries) lies his meeting with the priest in the cathedral. What K has assumed to be a chance encounter turns out to have been a planned summoning, and the priest informs him that he is also the prison chaplain, another of the Court's employees. Part of their conversation consists of the parable *Before the Law*, which is followed by a series of exegeses by the priest, of which each contradicts every other without ever

departing from the 'facts' of the text, and yet they are all supported by a long and learned tradition of commentary. Each reading is nuanced, self-contained and convincing in itself, though the priest reminds K that they are all inevitably limited and partial, for, after all, as the commentators themselves note, "the right perception of any matter and a misunderstanding of the same matter do not wholly exclude each other" (Kafka, 1992, 238). And not only is each reading itself in error, each reading taken by itself also induces only error. It does not matter if K objects to a particular point or if he agrees; the priest reminds him he is either forgetting to include crucial textual details or adding his own words when there is no support for them. He advises K not to overestimate the extent of his own or anybody's interpretation: "I'm only showing you the various opinions concerning the point. You must not pay too much attention to them. The scriptures are unalterable and the comments often enough merely express the commentators' despair" (239).

Ultimately the parable is both inexhaustible and impenetrable, a Derridean demonstration of the 'deconstructive abyss' long *avant la lettre*. But I wish to use the parable and its readings as an illustration of the activity of interpreting fiction itself, and to advance two related arguments. The first is simply to point out that lives are being consumed (and endlessly 'deferred') in and during the events described. Both within the parable and the wider framework of the novel that contains it, we see how such radical deconstructibility employed in these particular contexts ultimately destroys the lives of the man from the country and K respectively (rather than liberate them, ironically, as deconstruction is widely supposed to do). Within the parable, the doorkeeper and the man from the country live out vast parts of their lives doing nothing but facing each other off in their equally enigmatic yet opposed states of ignorance. And K's interest in a solution emerging to the riddle is hardly 'theoretical' either: in the next chapter he will be dragged off for execution by a Law he never understood, for a crime never specified to him. Yet in the chapters before he has found the Court to be

the basis of everything else he encounters, the pervasiveness of power performed on a scale such as Foucault would later describe in his theories and histories. Hitherto unconnected dimensions of K's life and the city have been revealed to him as actually conducted under the auspices of the Court. Every exchange now comes embedded within that basis; every new encounter, with painter, priest or chambermaid, turns out to be an encounter with another aspect of the Court.

'Novelistic Deconstruction': The Re-Interpretability of Fictional Narrative.

Perhaps such pervasive presence does prefigure a Foucauldian/Althusserian conception of impenetrable, impersonal and institutionalised power regulating every "microphysical" aspect of social and individual life, just as the priest laying interpretation upon partial interpretation as derived from an inexhaustibly generative text (thus turning "lying into a universal principle" (1992, 242) according to K.) evokes (later) Derridean deconstruction. But we wish to argue that Kafka's mode and methods of narration are fundamentally different from either of these thinkers. In his work such readings come dynamically embodied within a novel, rather than argued philosophically as separate theories or as 'concepts' arising out of general historiography, and this distinction is crucial. Literary commentators and theorists of other persuasions have offered various readings of K.'s predicament besides the ones above: some in doing so have conferred upon him crimes even the Court never clarified. There are Marxists who have indicted K. for being "both a product and an agent in a very particular matrix of bourgeois mercantilism" (Kafka, 1992, xi). Those of psychoanalytic leanings have found evidence in the text to accuse him of the crime of long neglecting his mother: others have deemed him guilty because of his alleged inability to conceive of relationships with women except on the grossest sexual terms.⁶

⁶ Kundera lists a range of the interpretative verdicts on Joseph K. over the years: Marxist, Freudian, biographical, psychoanalytic. For a fuller discussion, see *Testaments Betrayed* (1996, 206-207).

All such critical versions (like those of the commentators of the parable) have more or less evidence from hints and details present in the text, but what is greater than each of these separate inferences is the sum of their parts; i.e. the novel that evokes them all through its narrative performance. In *The Trial*, through the details of mere (or sheer) storytelling, all such readings, without ever being separately named or delineated as such, are evoked inextricably together as dimensions of K's being-in-the world, and therefore raised as interpretative possibilities. The narrative, just like the parable within it, is endlessly deconstructible, without ever being encompassed by any one of its interpretations. In being thus narrated--- as a novel which itself specifies no charges against its protagonist--- no one reading of K's tale outlaws all others by fitting perfectly the fullness of his fate, just as no commentator can claim to have explained the priest's parable once and forever. By evoking so many interpretative possibilities simultaneously through a single story, fiction suggests that each separately discernible dimension of existence (socio-economic, psychoanalytic, or theological) might be read as interacting in actual performance with many others---- entering, making, and shaping the irreducible totality of (even) one human becoming. The more of existence that is evoked, the less its re-readability is exhausted. Bakhtin formulates the interpretative dilemma---- to him "the novel gets on poorly with other genres" (1996, 7), interpretative as well as discursive. He continues:

The novel sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness [...]. The utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel. In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear [...]. Everything works as long as there is no mention of the novel. Faced with the problem of the novel, genre theory must submit to a radical re-structuring (7-8).

The previous section argued that from a fiction-maker's perspective, the act of telling new stories is potentially endless, because of the limits of each particular narration, and because the fullness of existence upon which their work is premised is inevitably beyond encompassing. This instance of interpreting *The Trial* illustrates some further implications of that argument, for us as critics and readers. It is not a choice of

interpretative paradigms on offer any more: (even though, as we see above, critics of various persuasions each conduct their exclusive trial on K, and pronounce absolute verdicts). But the text never confirms if it is finally an allegory pre-emptively illustrating a Foucauldian/Althusserian theory of social existence as being solely the affects and implications of impersonal power, *or* a Derridean demonstration of textuality as pure and endless play, *or* a Marxist critique of bourgeois mercantilism or anything else, where each position may be knocked down by a better argument restating another. In fact, K.'s story performs the full implications of inhabiting the 'play' of pervasive power: power toys with him and he lives and dies dizzied by the play of its endless variations and radical inscrutability. Each exclusive critical version is filled out, inter-related and therefore challenged and extended in being performed interactively and simultaneously within the world of the novel.

Novelising the Fullness of History.

But Kafka goes further; not only does he thoroughly 'world' the selves in his story, he also demonstrates how 'worlds' are the sum performance of the selves that constitute them, by narrating the *humanity* behind every law, process, abstraction, and institution that plagues K. Just as Joyce fills out Bloom's Dublin, Kafka demonstrates what Kundera reminds us of: that a "historical situation is not a background, a stage set before which human situations unfold; it is itself a human situation, a growing existential situation" (1990, 38). For the novel, if there is no uncovering a being without simultaneously uncovering the multiple worlds that interactively constitute and surround him, those worlds in their turn are also novelistically revealed to be the multivalent and dynamic aggregate of the becomings of other human beings. To Kundera, "every situation is of man's making and can only contain what man contains" (115). So the novel must examine History not only in how it creates "revelatory existential situations" (36) for its characters, but also by demonstrating how "History itself must be understood and analysed as an existential situation" (38).

Kafka performs the pervasiveness of the Law through narrating the fullness of its *prose*, uncovering the “daily, concrete, momentary aspects” to being-in-the-world that Kundera considers the novel’s “ontological mission” (1996, 132-33): thus he fills in all the human detail constituting the Law, the Court, the Cathedral, the Magistrate and the Bank--- the institutions and ideologies defining K.’s world and their various enforcing interpreters and functionaries. Again, in a demonstration of the ways in which novels can move from narrating the fullness of particular selves to simultaneously detailing the social life of nations, Kafka dramatises how History on every level is always only human, in its institutions, abstractions and violations, in its processes and politics. And all of its epic proportions--- societies, upheavals, structures--- arise from the inextricably interactive immersions of human beings together in time and space: no more and no less. In *The Trial*, historicising (i.e. situating and dynamically performing) K.’s particular circumstances necessarily implies humanising the fullness of his world as well. The next section will advance the implications of this idea through the work of Lukacs and Tolstoy, but for now it is introduced as a particularly novelistic envisioning of History: the infinitely multiple, dynamic and interactive co-existence of everything human.

Kundera makes the bold claim that the novel “dealt with the unconscious before Freud, the class struggle before Marx, it practised phenomenology (the investigation of the essence of human situations) before the phenomenologists” (1990, 32). Novels in a sense can go further than particular theoretical positions ever can (and also pre-empt them, as *The Trial* appears to do with Foucault and Derrida), not by disproving or outdating them as world-views and ideologies attempt to do to each other, but rather by extending and exploring their insights. As with the various readings of *The Trial* above, a thinker’s particular insights can be re-dissolved into the rest of human performance and their interactive implications can be observed, not in the more abstracted, generalised or specialised conditions of philosophy or theory, but together with(in) the

rest of human existence.⁷ Saul Bellow affirms that “the artist cannot avoid the disorder of contemporary reality” because “he is bound, bitterly at the best of times, to the *amor fati*, as Nietzsche calls it, the imperative to embrace what is”:

Such an embrace is not a surrender; it is the necessary acceptance of a mass of complexities. To limit himself to any one of these single views would result in his segregation, would cut him off from seeing and understanding what he sees. This mountain of complexities is the supreme datum. It is our great given. And it is ours (1994, 142).

The emphasis is on the “necessary acceptance of a mass of complexities”, as well as the danger of limiting oneself to any one of these single views. But for all dogmatic claims to full and final versions of the world proffered by “the serious essayists of the last fifty years”, Bellow can muster only scant respect:

Essay after essay, book after book, confirms the most serious thoughts--- Baudelarian, Marxian, Psychoanalytic, etc. etc.--- of these most serious essayists... But how poorly they represent us. The pictures they offer no more represent us than we resemble the reconstructed reptiles and other monsters in a museum of palaeontology. We are much more limber, versatile, better articulated, there is much more to us (95-96).

Kundera describes why for instance, purely ‘political’ theory can never grasp the full existential import of even a ‘political’ situation, because being-in-the-world (history) must be narrated and interpreted much more fully as “a growing existential situation” (1990, 38):

When the culture is reduced to politics, interpretation is concentrated completely on the political, and in the end no one understands politics because purely political thought can never comprehend political reality (New York Times, 29-04-84).

⁷ This is how Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev formulate the distinction between the multivalent fullness evoked by a literary work and the boundaries and categories of ideologies, philosophical systems and theses:

Literature does not ordinarily take its ethical and epistemological content from ethical and epistemological systems or from outmoded ideological systems [...], but immediately from the very process of generation of ethics, epistemology, and other ideologies. This is the reason that literature so often anticipates developments in philosophy and ethics (ideologemes), admittedly in an undeveloped, unsupported, intuitive form. Literature is capable of penetrating into the social laboratory where these ideologemes are shaped and formed. [...] The generation of ideas, the generation of aesthetic desires and feelings, their wandering, their as yet unformed groping for reality, their restless seething in the depths of the so-called ‘social psyche’--- the whole as yet undifferentiated flood of generating ideology-- is reflected and refracted in the content of the literary work (1978, 17).

This study will argue (and attempt to demonstrate through its engagement with non-novelistic theories, histories and formulations of post-colonial nationhood) that fiction is perhaps the fullest form of ‘polysemic interdisciplinarity’ available in written discourse, in how it evokes the elemental *sheerness* of human Being by filling in the infinitely intricate (dynamic and multidimensional) webs of connection between separate ideas, world-views, and bodies of knowledge. How do the truth-claims of any one system of thought, however internally consistent, square up to the far larger ‘actuality’ that believers who live by absolutely opposite principles also exist in the world in full and free play with itself and everybody else besides, in the sum performance of human existence? The novel can evoke the incommensurable irreducibility involved in a conception of earthly life which will never be a merely intellectual choice between two or more philosophical theories, ideologies, or specialised disciplines, no matter how coherent or persuasive any of them are, but each such position *embodied* and *enacted* and every other besides. Again, this is not to suggest that the methods or the outcomes of disciplines based on more specialised, generalised, or theoretical foundations are less valid or more limited than those of fiction. But novels are a site of performance where many dimensions may be evoked simultaneously through the simple act of narrating a self’s story. The resulting re-interpretability may be termed the novel’s inbuilt demand for its own ‘deconstruction’.

What ideology of insect is it that Gregor Samsa finds himself transformed into when he awakes one morning in *The Metamorphosis* “from uneasy dreams”: Marxist, Althusserian, or Freudian? There is no one answer, but the text contains amply suggestive evidence for each reading, and many others. Again, it becomes impossible to contain in any final version the fullness of all that a self is during its living, and everything that living-in-the-world does with it. This is why the novel finds existence itself to be so fundamentally and endlessly re-interpretable. Such uniquely flexible yet

‘worlded’ discourse demands (and itself can give rise to) a uniquely flexible, worlded, and yet entirely ‘literary’ criticism, which is what this first chapter will finally consider.

Implications for Criticism: A Demand for Radical Polyphony.

Novels are just words. We respond to them in various critical modes in words alone. Yet our work is founded on the premise that words and worlds have a uniquely inseparable relationship within the texts of novels, as inseparable perhaps as that between beings and their worlds within the great ‘text’ of existence, the one text there is certainly no getting outside of. We have seen how by simply telling stories that portray selves as the dynamic resultants of bodies, languages, societies, ideologies, institutions and histories (inner and outer, private and collective), the novel in narrating a Joseph K or a Leopold Bloom can develop a multi-layered vision of socio-historical becoming to a fuller extent than any particular theoretical/specialised discourse could ever go. This last section, building on arguments primarily from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, is then the place to introduce the critical project of which this study will be a demonstration: a conception of a ‘novelistic criticism’ where theoretical, ‘worlded’, and ‘literary’ discussions do not have to be considered mutually exclusive options any longer.

It ought to be sufficiently evident by now that when this study argues that novels undertake a distinct kind of human discovery which in turn demands an especially attuned and flexible criticism, it is far removed from re-creating the *world-proof*, ‘pure’ formalist solipsism championed by the New Critics and their heirs.⁸ On the other hand, it explicitly seeks to distance itself from advocating any single theoretical/ideological

⁸ Bellow dismisses any notion of aesthetic transcendence for the writer as impatiently as he rejects all-encompassing theorists. “As for Hegel’s art, freed from ‘seriousness’ and glowing on the margins, raising the soul above painful involvement in the limitations of reality through the serenity of form, that can exist nowhere now, during this struggle for survival”. But out of this “struggle” from within our inextricable immersions he also detects “an immense, painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller account of what we human beings are, who we are” (1994, 96).

For an extended critique of the formalist “severing of the [literary] work from real social intercourse” see Bakhtin and Medvedev (1978, 146-158).

persuasion that would claim to exclusively encompass every aspect of a fictional text. For instance, Bakhtin and Medvedev make clear that “the content of literature reflects the ideological purview, i.e. other, non-artistic ideological formations” (1978, 18). But, they insist, this does not mean that the nature of literary mediation is to be simplistically understood as being mere passive reflection; nor can its workings be equated with those of other discursive practices:

In reflecting these other signs, literature creates new forms, new signs of ideological intercourse. And these signs are works of art, which become a real part of the social reality surrounding man. Reflecting something external to themselves, literary works are at the same time in themselves valuable phenomena of the ideological environment. Their role cannot be reduced to the merely auxiliary one of reflecting other ideologemes. Literary works have their own independent ideological role and their own type of refraction of socio-economic existence (1978, 18).

They go on to list some of their objections to reductive and dogmatic evaluations of literary works, “in studying the reflections of the ideological environment in literary content”:

[They] limited literature to reflection alone; that is, [they] lowered it to the status of a simple servant and transmitter of other ideologies, almost completely ignoring the independently meaningful reality of the literary work, its ideological independence and originality. [...]

[They] finalised and dogmatised basic ideological points reflected by the artist in his work, thus turning active and generating problems into ready theses, statements, and philosophical, ethical, political, religious, etc. conclusions. [They] did not consider or understand the vital fact that the essential content of literature only reflects generating ideologies, only reflects the living process of the generation of the ideological horizon. [...]

Almost all critics and historians of literature committed these same mistakes with varying degrees of crudeness. The result was that literature, an independent and unique ideology, was equated with other ideologies and vanished in them without a trace. Analysis squeezed the literary work for poor philosophy, superficial political declarations, ambiguous ethics, and short-lived religious doctrines. What remained after this squeezing, i.e. the most essential thing, the artistic structure of the literary work, was simply ignored as mere technical support for other ideologies (Bakhtin & Medvedev, 1978, 18-19).

In a similar vein, Edward Said lists some of the either-or camps involved in the battle of attrition that to him comprises much of contemporary criticism. There is the school of “criticism as scholarship, humanism, a ‘servant’ to the text, [...] versus criticism as revisionism and as itself a form of literature” (1991, 229). There are the related debates

of “criticism as detached from the political/social world versus criticism as a form of philosophical metaphysics, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or any of these, versus criticism as actually having to do with such “contaminated” fields of history, the media, and economic systems” (229). He continues:

In the absence of an enclosing domain called literature, with clear outer boundaries, there is no longer an authorised or official position for the literary critic. But neither is there some new sovereign method, some new critical technology compelling allegiance and intellectual loyalty. Instead there is a babel of arguments for the limitlessness of all interpretation; of ideologies that proclaim the eternal yet determinate value of literature or ‘the humanities’; for all systems that in asserting their capacity to perform essentially self-confirming tasks allow for no counterfactual evidence. You can call such a situation pluralistic if you like or, if you have a taste for the melodramatic, you can call it desperate” (229-230).

This study wishes to situate itself *post-* all of the above positions, because it believes the novel ontologically encompasses and exceeds them all. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said is looking for a way beyond both “the great literary text” of “self delighting humanism” as an “isolated paddock in the broad cultural field” (1991, 225) as well as the option of having to choose any exclusive hermeneutic horizon. In *Culture and Imperialism* twelve years later, he describes his conception of a ‘secular critic’, a “liminal figure”, producing work that is “sceptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failings”. The secular critic carries the responsibility of contrapuntally mediating a “hybrid cultural work”:

We must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others (1993, 36).

With such principles in mind, we wish to formulate a reading practice that derives from the singular characteristics of novelistic discourse itself and its uniquely ‘worlded’ words such as we have hitherto outlined, that would include aspects of diverse intellectual disciplines and interpretative paradigms, and yet work as an alternative to all mutually exclusive categories and systems. As an example, in our examination of the extract from Kafka (or in Gregor Samsa’s predicament in *The Metamorphosis*), we

saw how a fiction is irreducible to any one critical dogma, even though (and precisely because) it can generate so many readings simultaneously. A novelistic criticism would attempt to be as flexibly interactive in its approaches as the fictional material itself demands. It would comprise thoroughly 'worlded' critical performances (i.e. readings that include cultural, political, socio-economic and historical dimensions) that are at the same time entirely 'literary'; and yet it would have no claim to mastery over the text, just as any particular novel itself is only a story among numberless other possible stories.

More than any other, it is Bakhtin's conception of a "sociological stylistics" that points us towards such a criticism. Bakhtin argues that if "at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom, [representing] the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so on" (1996, 291), then all of them "may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically" (292) in the world of the novel. He discovers the "language of the novel [to be] a system of languages that mutually and ideologically inter-animate each other" (47), a performance of the world's living heteroglossia:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...], but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property [...]: Language [...] is populated---overpopulated--- with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process (293-294).

But of course, portraying such live, seething 'dialogics' is inseparable from portraying the material/social relationships, structures, processes and imbalances of power pervading these collisions of selves in the world. Writing with Medvedev, Bakhtin expresses vividly the thorough sociality and historicity of all communication:

Every ideological product (ideologeme) is a part of the material social reality surrounding man, an aspect of the materialised ideological horizon. Whatever a word might mean, it is first of all materially present, as a thing uttered, written, printed, whispered, or thought. That is, it is always an objectively present part of man's social environment (Bakhtin & Medvedev, 1978, 8).

This implies that "every concrete utterance is [also necessarily] a social act" (1978, 120):

At the same time that it is an individual material complex, a phonetic, articulatory, visual complex, the utterance is also a part of social reality. [...] Its individual reality is already [...] the reality of a historical phenomenon. Not only the meaning of the utterance but also the very fact of its performance is of historical and social significance, as, in general, is the fact of its realisation in the here and now, in given circumstances, at a certain historical moment, under the conditions of the given social situation. [...] [Thus] an organic, historical, and actual connection is established between the meaning and act (utterance), between the act and the concrete socio-historical situation (120).

Based on such a conception of the involved, interactive, multivalent existence of words in the actual world, Bakhtin conceives the task of the novelist:

The novelist working in prose [...] welcomes the heteroglossia and language diversity of the literary and extraliterary language into his own work, not only not weakening them but even intensifying them (for he interacts with their particular self-consciousness). It is in fact out of this stratification of language, its speech diversity and even language diversity, that he constructs his style (1996, 298). [...]

The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages--- rather, he welcomes them into his work (299).

It is an argument that describes how novels derive directly from, and thereby reflect, contribute to, and describe other social, ideological and historical inter-animating conflicts and contexts (in Saidian terms, their 'worldedness'). Bakhtin and Medvedev never claim that there is any more to fiction than language(s), but because language to them is never separable from its inextricable involvement in the totality of being social,

they extend both lines of argument to discover that the multivalent struggles involved in its uses can be performed and evoked *within* the text of a novel: “[languages] encounter one another and live in the consciousness of real people [...]. These languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1996, 292). Thus this fictional capacity to commingle voices also necessitates representing the dynamic interaction of conflicting perspectives, world-views and socio-historical standpoints:

The speaking person in a novel is always, to one degree or another, an *ideologue*, and his words are always *ideologemes*. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance. It is precisely as ideologemes that discourse becomes the object of representation in the novel, and it is for the same reason novels are never in danger of becoming a mere aimless verbal play. The novel, being a dialogised representation of an ideologically freighted discourse [...] is of all verbal genres the one least susceptible to aestheticism as such, to a purely formalistic playing about with words (1996, 333).

It is the performance of such thoroughly socialised and ‘embodied’ heteroglossia that inevitably implies that the novel is always ‘worlded’ from *within*. Further, Bakhtin’s argument is double-layered, because after demonstrating the distinctiveness of novelistic discourse, he posits that it demands (and itself provides the basis for) an especially adapted criticism, one that at least attempts a similar kind of soluble flexibility in its reading approaches. And just as fictionalised polyphony does not occur between disembodied voices in an ideologically neutral vacuum, the critical analysis of such discourse can never be a matter of linguistics and/or formalist stylistics alone. This is where (in a manner analogous to the Saidian formulation of a “contrapuntal” cultural criticism that always foregrounds its ‘worldedness’) Bakhtin calls for a “sociological stylistics”:

Any stylistics capable of dealing with the distinctiveness of the novel as a genre must be a *sociological stylistics*. The internal social dialogism of novelistic discourse requires the concrete social context of discourse to be exposed, to be revealed as the force that determines its entire stylistic structure, its ‘form’ and its ‘content’, determining it not from without, but from within; for indeed social dialogue reverberates in all aspects of discourse, in those relating to ‘content’ as well as the ‘formal’ aspects themselves. (1996, 300).⁹

The principles and approaches expressed above are closely analogous to our envisioning of how a ‘novelistic criticism’ would operate: as a form of critical mediation thoroughly ‘worlded’ and yet literary at the same time because it arises out of and refers to the unique ontological perspectives and working practices of novels. Bakhtin’s conception of a “sociological stylistics” firmly eschews the formalism that “defines itself as a stylistics of ‘private craftsmanship’ and ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist’s study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations, and epochs” (259), in favour of “empty, evaluative terms for the characterisation of language, such as ‘expressiveness’, ‘imagery’, ‘force’, ‘clarity’, and so on” (260). In the same terms as Kundera characterises the novel, a ‘novelistic criticism’ would attempt to be “polyhistorical” in its “powers of incorporation” (1996, 64), and flexible to various interpretative approaches and dimensions. Hence, as for fiction, so for its criticism: “*everything becomes theme (existential questioning)*” (Kundera, 1996, 165).

Thus, by building on and adapting aspects of Bakhtin’s conception, the rest of our study will attempt to demonstrate that there might exist a criticism derived from the

⁹ This is how Bakhtin together with Medvedev formulates his conception of a literary/linguistic analysis of novels that will also simultaneously mediate as a “social evaluation”:

It is this historical actuality, which unites the individual presence of the utterance with the generality and fullness of its meaning, which makes meaning concrete and individual and gives meaning to the word’s phonetic presence here and now, that we call social evaluation. [...] It determines the historical physiognomy of every action and every utterance, its individual, class, and epochal physiognomy (1978, 121). [...]

It is social evaluation which inseparably weaves the artistic work into the general canvas of the social life of a given historical epoch and a given social group (125).

Yet if we are to indicate directions of thought comparable to our project, it is advisable to point out simultaneously our points of departure. At the time of composing this text, the authors were convinced that “only Marxism can bring the correct philosophical direction and necessary methodological precision to the problems [they have] raised” (26). Even though it is an extraordinarily undogmatic version of Marxism that they espouse, any such avowal runs counter to our own novelistically derived commitment to interpretative flexibility. Nor do we ever claim to uncover, as they do through the dialectics of “social evaluation”, “the major historical aims of a whole epoch” (121).

Bakhtin himself in later phases was to significantly alter direction and conviction upon this point.

nature of novelistic narrative itself that is never more or less than literary, but that can fuse various concerns--- political, historical, psychological, formal, feminist etc.--- and perform them together, without ever having to claim fidelity or finality on behalf of one or the other position.¹⁰ We will establish that such a reading approach (where everything becomes “existential questioning”) might be especially relevant to nation-building fiction, just as fiction itself might be an exceptionally encompassing mode of discourse when it comes to narrating nations. As Joseph K’s narrative and the readings of the ‘inexhaustible’ parable demonstrate, such a criticism would have to be as intellectually flexible as his fullness and his fate are variously interpretable. It would have to be as methodologically accommodating as it is plastic to keep pace with the radical re-readability of its material, because after all, “the right perception of any matter and a misunderstanding of the same matter do not wholly exclude each other” (Kafka, 1992, 238). Such a criticism will be an effort to realise Said’s generous claim for critical consciousness, which far from erecting walls around systems, to him is nothing “if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives” (1991, 247).

¹⁰ Of course we recognise that much contemporary theory itself has begun to articulate analogous forms of hermeneutic flexibility, as many thinkers now implicitly seek to avoid the dangers of exclusivity and systematising. For instance, Fredric Jameson enunciates a critical strategy that is one of “interdisciplinary transcodings”, which makes attempts at “cognitive mappings” of “open totalities”. Or there is Lyotard’s “paralogy” between “heterogeneous language games”, Spivak’s ever-watchful openness to textual “aporia”, and Said’s conception above of a “secular critic” who can read the hybrid realities of the world “contrapuntally”.

Perhaps Bakhtin would consider such evolving flexibility as symptomatic of the “novelisation of other genres” which would entail that:

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the ‘novelistic’ layers of literary language, they become dialogised, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally--- this is the most important thing--- the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openedness, living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality. (1996, 7).

But the distinction in both premise and method between such formulations and ours remains, in that none of them are derived novelistically; i.e. from a mode of discourse uniquely ‘worlded’ from within, and premised upon the dynamic fullness of beings-in-their-worlds.

Chapter 2): Narrative and Imperialism: Intersecting Histories, Inter-Related Methodologies?

There isn't 'The Novel': There are only Novels.

Yet there would remain an inescapable air of bad faith about the rest of this study if it was based solely on foundations of narrative 'potential' that presented 'the novel' as some ideal narrative democracy, as if every actual text has always been potentially open to everybody's story. Of itself, such a conception would be misleading and inadequate. While not relinquishing what has been argued above about its intrinsic ontological openness to fullness, to new stories as well as heterogeneous re-readings, of course we remain aware of how disingenuous it would be to claim that actual novels are as open to the world as their formal capacities would allow them, of forgetting the implications of their production and situation, that there are always processes of (de)selection at work, by a novelist who is him- or herself a being-in-the-world creating a thing for a world, all of which embody discourses and their prejudices and limits. As Said establishes in so much of his work, all such processes are 'worlded' from without; they come implicated in ideologies and politics, and demonstrate and extend power and its imbalances, whether the lacks and omissions are self-aware or not. The novel may well be 'worlded' from within and might carry implicit acknowledgement of its limits and specificities, but that cannot excuse us from ignoring the issues involved in its being a discourse in and of the world around it. Addressing questions of such imbalances has particular relevance to any post-colonial discussion of the novel's heritage, before we can move on to exploring its use and extension by African and Indian writers. The novel has after all a European, primarily bourgeois provenance, and non-European (not to mention non-bourgeois or non-male) characters have often been subjected to exclusions and distortions at the hands of illustrious past practitioners. As we shall explore in more detail in this chapter, for many post-colonial critics, inheriting the novel

form is a problem (and a potential) comparable to inheriting the paradigm of nationhood as a partially “derivative discourse”, which in its earlier incarnations is so inextricably associated with a high-industrial, imperialist, bourgeois Europe.

The given-ness of all human fullness and its being equally worth including and examining, that we stated as the novel’s basis, irrespective of sex or race or mental health or any other ground of difference between those with the power to narrate and publish and those without, has not been a working conviction for all novelists by any means: again, this may be compared to how post-enlightenment modern nations promising legal equality, liberty and justice to all their citizens, at least originally (and perhaps even now) did not really ever mean *all* of their citizens, certainly not their black population, their slaves, or women, to name just a few instances. In the same vein, neither has doing everybody’s supposedly infinite facets ‘narrative justice’ always been a priority. Neither the novel nor the modern nation-state has ever been the utopian blank slate for everybody’s equal and distinct humanity to inscribe itself upon, even if it has ontologically (or constitutionally) promised such a potential. In fact there never is or has been anything like ‘the novel’: there have only been particular novels and novelists whose works are as error- and prejudice-prone as in any other field of discourse.

As we draw nearer to the main body of this work, the post-colonial novel and its attempts to interrogate the post-colonial nation, we will briefly examine some questions to do with the legacy of the European novel, and the circumstances of its origins and development, and extend these to asking about the very will to novelise, and the nature of the power involved in a novelist’s opportunity to represent. In later chapters such questions will be examined more exhaustively in analogous relation to a nation’s capacity to exclude, violate or misrepresent sections of its citizens, as examined (or reflected) in particular narratives. But for now, primarily through the work of Edward

Said, we introduce the question of whether a narrative capacity is itself inherently 'colonialist'? Is there more than a coincidence in how the novel arose to pre-eminence at the same time as European colonial domination was at its height? Is a fiction a comparably 'imperialist' domain where characters only live and speak at the mercy of their narrating master? Such questions create grave and complicated ironies for any post-colonial novelistic project, and must be addressed at the outset of such a study. Just as many post-colonial critics and thinkers argue about the perpetuation of paradigms of nationhood which continue to repress and violate people rather than liberate them because of basic structural and ideological issues that were never addressed or altered after independence, we wish to ask how any writing can be truly post-imperial if it is true that the same patterns of representational violation and control are implicitly perpetuated through the very basis of novelistic narrating?

The Novel and 'Narrative Imperialism'.

In a chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said explicitly equates the will to novelise with the 18th and 19th century European will to colonise, in an illustration of his 'contrapuntal' ideal of reading all texts as thoroughly 'worlded' interventions with socio-economic and political origins and interpretative consequences. "Every novelist and every critic or theorist of the European novel notes its institutional character. The novel is fundamentally tied to bourgeois society" (1993, 83). And if global imperialism was inseparably intertwined with Western bourgeois industrial modernity, then for Said to make the diagnostic connection between the novel's bourgeois basis and the imperialist implications of such origins, is but a short step:

Without empire, I would go so far as saying, there is no European novel as we know it, and indeed if we study the impulses giving rise to it, we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism (82).

He clarifies that he is “not trying to say that the novel--- or the culture in the broad sense--- ‘caused’ imperialism, but that the novel as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society, and imperialism are unthinkable without each other”. He concludes that “imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible, I would argue, to read one without in some way dealing with the other” (84):

The appropriation of history, the historicisation of the past, the narrativisation of society, all of which give the novel its force, include the accumulation and differentiation of social space, space to be used for social purposes [...].

[And] underlying social space are territories, lands, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings of the imperial, and also the cultural contest. To think about distant places, to colonise them, to populate or depopulate them: all this occurs on, about, or because of land. [...] Imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory. The geographical sense makes projections--- imaginative, cartographic, military, economic, historical, or in a general sense cultural. It also makes possible the construction of various kinds of knowledge, all of them in one way or another dependent upon the perceived character and destiny of a particular geography (93).

It is an extraordinary claim, one that develops from the already broad charge against two centuries of the European novel into an epistemological accusation against the form itself. Said would presumably find naïve (and Western-bourgeois) Saul Bellow’s claim that the novel is a “series of moments” where as writer or reader, “we are willingly engrossed in the experiences of others” (1994, 62), because according to his line of argument, the novelist does not confer voices on his or her various subjects or allow their interactive multi-dimensionality to reveal itself; rather he or she controls and regulates those voices with the same violence to produce narrative as a colonist would have employed his slaves to produce sugar. For Said, the wills involved in either case are comparable: “in both realms we find common values about contest, surmounting odds and obstacles, and patience in establishing principle with profit over time” (83).

In this particular chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, much of his substantiation of these large charges rests upon a single point in a single work: why does Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* pay such little attention--- no more than ideologically ‘neutral’ passing mentions--- to Sir Thomas Bertram’s slave holdings in Antigua? This, for Said,

establishes her complicity with the colonial project, in her unquestioning assumption of its 'normality':

The nineteenth-century English novels stress the continuing existence (as opposed to revolutionary overturning) of England. Moreover they *never* advocate the giving up of colonies, but take the long-range view that since they fall within the orbit of British dominance, that dominance is a sort of norm, and thus conserved along with the colonies (88).

Of course it is as appropriate (and valuable) for Said to point out and re-interpret the repressions within and around Austen's apparently self-contained, enclosed universe, as it is for him to situate any cultural production in the context of the diverse currents producing it; but even if we take the thoroughly valid point about the omissions in her text, is it enough evidence to establish his indictment of the form itself as collaboratively colonialist in its very methods? He demonstrates convincingly that no novelist is immune to his or her immersion in the ideologies and 'normalised' assumptions of their age, and no work uninfected by incompleteness.¹¹ But are Austen's particular lacks reflective of a fundamental lack within fiction itself, because if it is so, it would imply crucially ironic consequences, potentially paralysing even, for any post-imperial inheritors of such a 'tainted' tradition? These charges question the very basis of fictionalising, and therefore require ontologically premised responses. We will here begin to articulate a defence building on the work of the previous chapter, even though any credible defending must inevitably stand or fall on the substance of our actual readings of post-colonial texts themselves.

¹¹ This is not to undercut Said's point about the exclusion of Antigua, but within the bounds of *Mansfield Park* itself, we do see the performance and the implications of Sir Bertram's 'benevolent' patriarchy at home on his wife and family, which might metonymically allow us to imagine what sort of slave-master he may be. For instance, his tyranny drives both his daughters to desperate elopements just to get away from their home, thus portraying a degree of desperation rare in Austen's world.

Refuting 'Narrative Imperialism': a) Fiction's Irreducible Polyglossia, and the Question of Textual Ideology.

As an important initial point of dissent, we must point out how throughout this book, Said conflates different genres in his excavation of the blind spots in Western high culture that condone or ignore imperialism. Thus an Austen or Conrad novel is interpreted in the same way as a racist speech that Ruskin once made in Oxford, or an essay of Carlyle's. This is entirely consistent as a critical approach where the novel is only considered a discourse among discourses with nothing ontologically distinct about itself. But alternatively we could re-employ Bakhtin and his conception of the novel's unique capacity to contain raucous, unresolved heteroglossia, that is irreducible to a monologic authorial voice or intention in the way a speech or an essay might be. For Bakhtin, such "authoritative discourse" as the latter "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, [...] we encounter it with its authority already fused to it" (1996, 342):

[Such "centripetal" modes of] discourse permit no play with the context framing [them], no play with [their] borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylising variants on [them]. [Such discourse] enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority---with political power, an institution, a person... (343).

Yet if existence is viewed from an embodied, dialogic, and thereby thoroughly relativised perspective such as we have argued always underlies the speaking voices within any fiction, if it is believed that any "living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, [and so] cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue" (Bakhtin, 1996, 276), then the novel, as the discursive medium most committed to representing such multivalent meaningfulness, is inevitably "penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions [...]; such [a form] need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organise them" (277):

For the writer of artistic prose, [...] the object reveals first of all precisely the socially heteroglot multiplicity of its names, definitions and value judgements. Instead of the virginal fullness and inexhaustibility of the object itself, the prose writer confronts a multitude of routes, roads and paths that have been laid down in the object by social consciousness. Along with the internal contradictions inside the object itself, the prose writer witnesses as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia *surrounding* the object (278).

Bakhtin goes as far as to assert that since “both object and language are [always] revealed to the novelist in their historical dimension, in the process of social and heteroglot becoming, for [him] there is no world outside his socio-heteroglot perception--- and there is no language outside the heteroglot intentions that stratify that world (330). This degree of “internal dialogisation” (284) implies that the “descriptive and expressive means” employed within novels forever “so to speak, criticise themselves” (45). We have seen how he anticipates the critical problems involved in attempting to force such “centrifugal” narratives to fit any one interpretative intention, as well as in treating the novel as being exactly equivalent to any other mode of discourse:

The utter inadequacy of literary theory is exposed when it is forced to deal with the novel. In the case of other genres literary theory works confidently and precisely, since there is a finished and already formed object, definite and clear. [...] Everything works as long as there is no mention of the novel. Faced with the problem of the novel, genre theory must submit to a radical re-structuring. (8).

A novel can include alternative envisionings of the same questions simply by dissolving disagreeing selves, their autonomous voices and interrelated contexts, and performing their conflicts within the same story. In the ‘polyphonic universe’ of *The Brothers Karamazov* for instance, Dostoyevsky can portray contests of perspectives over every element he explores (selfhood, sovereignty, God), and the narrative still carries the implications of the resulting conflicts and paralyses. Is all such unresolved dialogic cacophony, where we encounter in near equal proportions atheism and the consequent existential agonies in one brother (Ivan), and faith and its consoling, justifying rewards in another (Alyosha), not to mention murderers, monks, gluttons and bastards besides, really reducible in our readings to one dominant ideology espoused by the text (which

would ‘prove’ some thesis or dogma, in the way that *all* 18th and 19th century English novels prove to Said the “far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority on the one hand, and, on the other, complex ideological configurations underlying the tendency to imperialism” (1993, 82)?¹² To consider even a much more ‘univocal’ instance, isn’t the narrative ‘I’ of *Notes from Underground* instantly embodied, located, and relativised precisely by the voice admitting to its narration, so that there is never any illusion about its omniscience?

Medvedev and Bakhtin describe the limitations of all those rigid interpreters of novelistic narrative who would reduce or arrest its dynamic capacity to generate readings into any final statements of ‘textual ideology’:

[They] finalised and dogmatised basic ideological points reflected by the artist in his work, thus turning active and generating problems into ready theses, statements, and philosophical, ethical, political, religious, etc. conclusions. [They] did not consider or understand the vital fact that the essential content of literature only reflects generating ideologies, only reflects the living process of the generation of the ideological horizon. [...]

For in the ideological horizon of any epoch and any social group there is not one, but several mutually contradictory truths, not one but several diverging ideological paths. [...] Even within the limits of a thesis, party or belief, one is not able to ‘rest on his laurels’. The course of ideological generation will present him with two new paths, two truths, and so on. The ideological horizon is constantly developing--- as long as one does not get bogged down in some swamp. Such is the dialectic of real life.

¹² Kundera for one argues that very different interpretative implications are opened up by the irreducibly ‘dialogic’ nature of novelistic narrative:

Creating the imaginary terrain where moral judgement is suspended was a move of enormous significance: only there could novelistic characters develop--- that is, individuals conceived not as a function of some pre-existent truth, as examples of good or evil, or as representations of objective laws in conflict, but as autonomous beings grounded in their own morality, in their own laws. Western society habitually presents itself as the society of the rights of man; but before a man could have rights, to consider himself as such and to be considered such; that could not happen without the long experience of the European arts and particularly of the art of the novel, which teaches the reader to be curious about others and to try and comprehend truths that differ from his own (1996, 7-8).

This is an entirely alternative genealogy of the link between the novel and its worldly and political implications, one which proposes that such narrative is potentially voice-conferring, rather than colonising, even in its representations of otherness (again, without taking away from Said’s point about numerous exclusions and misrepresentations). The question of such ontological ‘voice-conferring’ potential even when confronted by radical difference, and its implications for post-colonial writing, are investigated below.

And the more intensive, impetuous, and difficult this process of generation is, and the more substantially and deeply it is reflected in a genuine work of art, the more ideological, interested and attentive the reaction of the critic [...] will be. [...]

But it is bad if the critic imposes a thesis on the artist, a thesis in the sense of the 'last word', and not as the generation of an idea. It is bad if the critic forgets that there is no philosophy in literature, only philosophising, no knowledge, but only the process of cognition (1978, 19-20).

b) The Question of Authorial Ideology.

Of course, closely related to questions of the dominance of any particular ideological horizon within a novel, are doubts regarding the role, power and position of authorial intervention. For instance, referring to Bakhtin's exposition of Dostoyevskian 'dialogics' Simon Dentith qualifies that "while it is certainly true that [...] Dostoyevsky's novels go to extraordinary lengths to grant authority to the word of his characters, it is hard to agree that no effort is made to sort them into some kind of hierarchy (1995, 45). He continues:

It would be a strange reading of *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, that did not recognise the massive weight of authorial authority lying behind the discourses of the elder Zossima and Alyosha, or the intense unease surrounding Ivan's anguished atheism. These overarching commitments remain over and above the internal dialogisation to which they are subject within the novel, and are strikingly reinforced by the structure of the book, by the narrative outcomes (however inconclusive), in short by the whole overall force of the novel. [...] In fact is impossible to imagine a novelist who does not sort the words of his or her characters into some sort of hierarchy of significance (45).

Elsewhere, Bakhtin and Medvedev point out the refracted ideological presence of authorial perspective as embodied in (and shaping) the characters and horizons of a fiction: "the hero of a novel [...] if taken out of the novelistic structure, is not at all a social type in the strict sense, but is only the ideological refraction of a given social type [...], the ideological refraction [...] in the social consciousness of a definite social group [...] to which [the author] belongs" (1978, 21).¹³

¹³ They use the example of Turgenev and his hero Bazarov in *Fathers and Sons*. For an extended discussion see Bakhtin and Medvedev (1978, 21-22).

It is with such complications in mind that we must respond to Said's implication that authorial control might be analogous to colonial authority; and needless to add, we must do so on novelistic grounds alone, without ever lapsing into arguments of aesthetic 'purity' and/or ideological 'neutrality'. Bakhtin and Medvedev themselves go on to provide the basis of a response:

It is true that this ideologeme [i.e. the presence of a particular type of hero as refracted by the perspective of the author's specific socio-ideological standpoint] [...], upon entering the novel and becoming a dependent structural element of the artistic whole, in no way ceases to be an ethical, philosophical ideologeme. On the contrary, it brings to the structure of the novel all its extra-artistic ideological meaning, all its seriousness, and the fullness of its ideological responsibility (1978, 22).

Yet, not only is it both essentialist and simplistic to judge the author or his work thereby according to any pre-determined ideological bind without taking detailed account of specific depictions (i.e. the argument that an author thus socially situated can only create a certain manner of character and put forward a defined range of perspectives), it would be premised upon a crucial misunderstanding of the nature of novelised material. Bakhtin and Medvedev themselves attach the following caveats against any manner of interpretative determinism:

But, without losing its direct meaning, the ideologeme, in entering the artistic work, enters into a chemical, not mechanical, relationship, with the features of artistic ideology. Its ethical, philosophical spirit becomes an ingredient of poetic spirit, and its ethical-philosophical responsibility is absorbed by the totality of the author's artistic responsibility for the whole of his artistic statement. The latter, of course, is as much a social statement as an ethical, philosophical, political or any other ideological statement is [...]
[Thus] the unquestioned presence of the ethical-philosophical ideologeme in the composition of the artistic whole far from guarantees its correct and methodologically pure extraction. It is in chemical combination with the artistic ideologeme. [...]

The extra-artistic ideologeme, in chemical combination with the artistic construction, forms the thematic unity of the given work. [...] All of this admits of special study following special methods (21-22).

Once again, they specifically warn that "it [becomes] necessary to take still stricter account of the fact that the ideologeme itself and the ideological horizon which enfolds it are in the process of generation (1978, 23), and that in most cases the work of isolating "extra-artistic ideologemes from artistic structures" (in the way that Said

presents evidence separated from its novelised context) is possibly “baseless and futile” (22). Besides, such extrapolation risks committing the added error of confusing the “reflection of the ideological purview to be the direct reflection [...] of life itself”:

[Such work] does not take into account the fact that the literary reflects only the ideological horizon, which itself is only the refracted reflection of real existence. To reveal the world depicted by the artist is not to penetrate into the actual reality of life (1978, 18).¹⁴

Bakhtin does not leave unconsidered the question Dentith raises--- of authorial prejudice/ideological orientation didactically weighting the structure of the novel or privileging a particular hierarchy of perspectives:

Even when [...] the novelist comes forward with his own unitary and fully affirming language (without any distancing, refraction or qualifications) he knows that such language is not self-evident and is not in itself incontestable, that it is uttered in a heteroglot environment, that such a language must be championed, [...] defended, motivated. In a novel even such unitary and direct language is polemical and apologetic, that is, it inter-relates dialogically with heteroglossia. It is precisely this that defines the utterly distinctive orientation of discourse in the novel--- an orientation that is contested, contestable and contesting--- for this discourse cannot forget or ignore, either through naivete or by design, the heteroglossia that surrounds it. [...]

Thus when an aesthete undertakes to write a novel, his aestheticism is [...] revealed [...] in the fact that in the novel there is represented a speaking person who happens to be an ideologue for aestheticism, who exposes convictions that are then subjected [...] to contest (1996, 332-333).

Thus, for any voice that has entered this particular terrain of discourse--- no matter how opinionated or evidently authorial--- it is impossible to escape its inevitable characteristics: of being situated, specific, immersed in and conflicting with other voices and perspectives, and all the resulting implications of interpretative relativity and multiplicity that are released thereby. The very form, by containing the unresolved aggregate of all of these conflicting voices, and at the same time only *some* such possible voices, will always deny itself any fullness or finality: even an apparently

¹⁴ This last objection also underlies our insistence in this thesis that our discussion confines itself solely to the issues raised by the worlds within novels, rather than attempting to mediate in any simplistic way between literary argument and ‘actual’ socio-historical/ideological analysis of the worlds (and national ‘realities’) these novels describe. All such analysis will be performed only upon fictionalised subjects, also because proving the possibility and extent of such work is after all one of our primary purposes.

'omniscient', disembodied narratorial voice is instantly contextualised by the fact that after all it can only concentrate on a few stories and situations. For all these reasons, no statement uttered within (or about) the multiple yet particular, dynamic and open-ended world of a novel can ever be treated as absolute or universal. In distinguishing a polyphonic work from any mode of monological discussion, Morson and Emerson describe "a change in the author's position" because the "form-shaping ideology itself *demand*s that the author cease to surrender monologic control (1990, 238):

Polyphony demands a work in which several consciousnesses meet as equals and engage in a dialogue that is in principle unfinalisable. [...] The direct power to mean, which in a monologic work belongs to the author alone, belongs to several voices in a polyphonic work. [...] [It] embodies dialogic truth by allowing the consciousness of a character to be truly 'someone else's consciousness'. [...]

In order to create a truly polyphonic work, the author must be able to confront his characters as equals. His own ideology may receive expression in the work; [...] it may be defended passionately by one or the other character or by the narrator. What is new [...] is that others may and do contest the author's ideology *as equals* (1990, 239).¹⁵

And of course, such unique characteristics demand a corresponding change in our position as critics. The diverse voices and life-trajectories represented within the novel that continually interact to perform their own 'deconstruction', that are seen and heard autonomously and yet delineated along with all their limits and oppositions, allow for (invite) an equivalently Barthesian release of readings. Even the novelist's attempts at arresting the implications of his own narrative through certain forms of resolution or closure do not need to be accepted by the reader, because in adopting this medium he has surrendered the privilege of sole 'authority', and accepted to be a mere version among versions. It is precisely the dynamism and diversity of the dialogisation unleashed throughout a novel's course, as well as the self-evident limits of its inevitable

¹⁵ They go on to develop these ideas in a theory of the authorial 'surplus' as renounced by the novelist (defined as the "knowledge of essential facts unavailable to the characters" (1990, 241) yet held by their creator), where only "such a renunciation can enable characters to be relatively free and independent" (241). For a fuller discussion see Morson and Emerson (241-243).

For the fullest performance of these ideas as demonstrated within this study, see our analysis of Ngugi's novels in Chapter 3.

specificities, that provide critics with more angles of dissent and re-entry than any other mode of discourse. It would require a very mechanical conception of the relationship that exists between author, text, and reader to distil the transmission of interpretations that occur between them into predictably didactic patterns (according to which the writer sends and each individual reader receives similar messages, based deterministically on their respective social locations and transmitted clearly and faithfully by the novel). None of these processes or entities can be essentialised and resolved into any final programme of textual/authorial ideology.

c) The Invitation to Re-Inscribe.

Further, the novel's invitation to being re-read is also a stage in the equally open invitation it offers to being radically re-written. In a famous critique of *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe cannot accept Conrad's novella being considered "a great work of art", because in his reading he finds that it "celebrates" the "dehumanisation" of its black non-characters, and no novel is a great one "which depersonalises a portion of the human race" (1988, 8-9). But if more than the individual misrepresentations of Austen or Conrad, it is fictionalising itself that is inherently imperialist, how did Achebe manage to turn his grievance with Conrad's 'dehumanisation' of Africans in a novel, into an alternative rendering of them through other novels? Surely the form itself, if it was so fundamentally implicated in Euro-imperialist ways of narrativising, should have rendered such re-inscriptions impossible?¹⁶ Or do Achebe and other such re-inscribers (Rhys, Coetzee, Peter Carey) also become 'narrative imperialists' the moment they begin to re-present? Achebe

¹⁶ Said himself recognises this re-inscriptive potential in the same chapter, though his doubts about the novel's implicit tendencies towards narrative imperialism have not disappeared: "on the one hand, when in a celebrated essay Chinua Achebe criticises Conrad's racism, he either says nothing about or overrides the limitations placed on Conrad by the novel as an aesthetic form. On the other hand, Achebe shows that he understands how the form works when, in some of his own novels, he rewrites-- painstakingly and with originality--- Conrad" (1993, 91).

displays an acute awareness of what it implies to possess the potential for representation (which always includes the potential to misrepresent):

In the end I began to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like. Just as in corrupt, totalitarian regimes, those who exercise power over others can do anything (2000, 24).

But as part of the same process of recognition he re-affirms his conviction in the re-inscriptive invitation made possible by narrative:

It began to dawn on me that although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious it could also be true or false, not with the truth or falsehood of a news item but as to its disinterestedness, its intention, its integrity... And reading came to mean reading with greater scrutiny and sometimes rereading with adult eyes what I had first read in the innocence of my literary infancy and adolescence [...].

[Yet] I am glad to reassure everyone about my abiding faith in the profession of literature, and further to suggest that the kind of careful and even cautious mode of reading that I am impliedly advocating does not signal despair; rather it is the strongest vote of confidence we can give our writers and their work (33-34). [...] Everywhere new ways to write about Africa have appeared, reinvesting the continent and its people with humanity, free at last of those stock situations and those stock characters, 'never completely human', that had dominated European writing about Africa for hundreds of years (49).

None of this is intended to challenge Said's particular points about *Mansfield Park*, *Vanity Fair*, or *Heart of Darkness*, but is it really possible to make the large and ultimately essentialising claim, when we survey a trans-historical, trans-national history of the novel, that fiction has *always* been a kind of 'narrative colonialism' deterministically defined in each local instance by some inherently conservative bourgeois-imperialist limits, both in its subjects and in the value-systems it propagates? Perhaps these are questions impossible to settle theoretically here and now, but our readings of individual novels throughout this study will revisit these doubts and attempt repeatedly to engage with them, because they are fundamental to deciding if novelistic vision creates as distinct and potentially inclusive a discourse as we have claimed for it, and if the novelist's will to narrate multiple, conflicting selves and worlds is more than the will to subjugate them.¹⁷

¹⁷ Oddly enough, Said is a novel-lover himself and he contradictorily cautions us in the same chapter: "for all their social presence, novels are not reducible to a sociological current and cannot be done

d) The Novel's Demand for Novelty, and its Post-Colonial Relevance.

Our final point in this statement of dissent is to do with this potential for radical re-inscription and its particular relevance to the post-colonial writer: the possibility always asking to be appropriated by any fiction's own implicit tensions--- of transforming through re-performing. Based on the example above (of Achebe among numerous others) and the more general propositions of the chapter before, we will argue that the novel, in its ontological openness to existential fullness and its formal flexibility towards being inscribed by various voices and trajectories of narrative, offers--- to anyone in a position to utilise it--- an opportunity to seize such a potential and re-embody it, *re-write* again and again new attempts to realise it. If existence is beyond encompassing, and all there ever is by way of narrative are the stories of variously situated particular selves (by variously 'worlded' particular authors, as Said correctly demonstrates) then the novel, rather than extending and confirming 'narrative colonialism' by imposing the illusions of omniscience or finality, can be seen as ever-open to the possibility of its own retellings, with the centering of a new subject, new voices and the imagining of new perspectives. Achebe disagreed deeply with the way Conrad, Joyce Cary and Karen Blixen had depicted Africans, so he went ahead and novelised Africans in his own way. (There is an easily imaginable novel that could be written imagining Austen's Sir Thomas Bertram in Antigua managing his plantation, thereby filling out the suppressions in the earlier narrative. Nothing about the form disallows this: in fact the demand is implicit for any novelist interested, only he or she in turn would inevitably omit narrating some other worlds, stories, and dimensions, and still more novelising would ensue).

Oskar Matzerath, a confessed asylum inmate, or Saleem Sinai, who is physically crumbling to bits by the end of *Midnight's Children*, and any other marginal voice can

justice to aesthetically, culturally, and politically as subsidiary forms of class, ideology, or interest (1993, 87).

be realised by a novelist within a work of fiction, with no effect whatsoever on its validity as a work of fiction. If the novel's domain is as open and de-centred as Bakhtin's heteroglossic readings find it to be, then anybody in that melee can occupy a page and start talking, either within the same novel (in its 'dialogic' inner universe), or, if a certain voice has been misrepresented or excluded altogether, in a new one. Though the novelist's subjectivity is a given limit, its limits only exist until next redefined. But there is also the privilege of his positioning, of *subjecthood*. This has been the opportunity it offers the post-colonial writer, for anybody ever written out and objectified by another's 'objectivity'.

Saul Bellow grants that literary styles and fashions might wear out, like Sensibility, Realism, or Symbolism do, "without exhausting either the mystery of mankind or the capacity of the novel to narrate it" (Bradbury, 1978, 69). If the history of fiction has created and survived a *Finnegan's Wake*, and can accommodate with equal validity everything distinct a Ngugi and a Nabokov have to bring to it, it is *because* it allows quarrel with itself relentlessly, in form and in focus; because no novel needs to agree with any other's openings or apparent closures, its subjects or its styles. The novel is always novel because subjectivity can never be transcended, which means it is forever open to revision. We wish to argue that this capacity has been part of its fundamental potential for the post-colonial novelist (and that this has meant much more than their merely becoming 'native' bourgeois 'narrative imperialists' in their turn, as Said's essentialist generalisation would imply). Within our thesis, the novel survives because it bases its capacity for re-inscription on an ontological openness to life's infinite re-interpretability. Carlos Fuentes surmises that the novel is able to be and do all it can because it can be "the genre without genre, or the genre of all genres" (1989, 77), because "its formal definition is uncertainty and this lack of certainty leads it to look for openings" (88):

The novel, if it is a genre at all, is an open genre, and openness means, again in Bakhtinian terms, dialogue, but not only dialogue of characters; it also means

dialogue of genres, of languages, of historical times, of civilisations, of unpublished possibilities.

The novel both reflects and creates an unfinished world made by men and women who are also unfinished. Neither the world nor its inhabitants have said their last word. The potential novel is thus the announcement and perhaps even the guaranty of a potential history. Of a potential life (88).

This potential novel forever able to announce new potential histories is the ontological opportunity every writer is always free to heterogeneously re-realise, and what this chapter will finally focus on as being particularly relevant to post-colonial narratives.

The Novel, the Nation, and the Post-Colonial: Themes and Aims.

This is the point at which the rest of the study devotes itself exclusively to post-colonial issues and fictions. Through all the foundation-laying hitherto and the readings that are to come, this thesis will propose that when the novel narrates nations, it can pay an especially comprehensive attention to the various possible multivalent and co-existent implications of nationhood. Fictional narrative can put the diverse details of 'nationhood' (as state *and* society) through uniquely exhaustive existential engagements in ways cultural/political theory, sociology or general historiography cannot (of course, such a claim would include applying and examining numerous non-novelistic theories and conceptions of post-colonial nationhood through the fictions we will analyse). This is particularly relevant to post-colonial societies, for most of whom the popular post-independence organising paradigm, for better or for worse, has been the nation-state. We will argue that the post-colonial novel, as evidenced in the work of certain Indian and African writers, has been used to comprehensively interrogate 'nationhood' as a specific set of ways/premises by which to direct and structure societies, by demonstrating how various novels have dissolved together in simultaneous performance the spectrum of disparate agents, processes, trajectories and existential dimensions (selves, families, ethnicities, locations, cultural values, class formations, economic choices, institutions and competing ideologies) that national becoming involves--- through their capacities for performing Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia', and what

Tolstoy argues in *War and Peace* to be fiction's capacity for creating a 'narrative calculus' (a term we define in the next section). Bakhtin posits that "the national literary language of a people with a highly developed art of prose, especially if it is novelistic prose with a rich and tension-filled verbal-ideological history, is in fact an organised microcosm that reflects the macrocosm [...] of national heteroglossia," (1996, 295). Because of its uniquely versatile capacities of form and content, we will argue that such discourse can rigorously inspect nations through various simultaneous levels while voicing its subject matter from a great range of perspectives and locations-- considering the impact of inhabiting nations from the point of view of the individual self (as with Leopold Bloom), to examining the nation as a dynamic terrain composed of the interactive becomings of variously situated selves (again, as with Bloom's Dublin). Through the modes of 'novelistic criticism' we have tried to establish, we will explore how the post-colonial novel has tried to narrate the immense, interactive range of human content disguised under the sign 'nation'--- simultaneously political, social, psychic, economic and interpersonal--- and thereby study how the novel can experimentally examine the existential coherence of nations, or deconstruct any such appearance. Our thesis is based on the premise that what is most valuable about fiction is that it can treat these questions not only theoretically, but in their interactively 'worlded' and dynamic fullness, and evoke them all together at once. And moreover, in the very process of doing so, it can simultaneously foreground questions and problems relating to its own strategies of interpreting and representing and perform them as part of the same narratives, often to the point of crisis.

Yet we will also ask if these novels find nationhood to be the only political paradigm under which to organise post-colonial existence. A section of this study (Section 4) will examine how certain novelists have envisioned alternative trajectories of being-in-the-world and heterogeneously premised terms of self-conception and fraternity, thus creating histories that do not look to 'national history' or the structures of modern

statehood for their validation. This last query applies also to the narratives about and by the women in these societies: another section (3) will examine fictions that focus on their particular relationships with their national histories, as well as distinct dimensions, voices and trajectories that cannot be encompassed within such categories.

The above questions will comprise the material for separate sections, but if the performance throughout of our critical interrogations will be novelistic, it will also contain everywhere the self-deconstructive doubt implicit in all the questions above, implicit most of all in the best novels. This is the last of the inter-related aims of this study: putting the novel through the test of its own narratives. Perhaps the exhaustive examination works both ways, and it is not just the novel that puts the construction of the post-colonial nation through uniquely demanding interrogations? How elastic (and plastic) does the transplanted form itself prove to be under the strain of narrating the immense heterogeneity of post-colonial national life, along with all the violence and disjunctures such historical becomings have often included? Is representing such diverse fullness beyond even the novel's capacities? In the range and depth of their narrative engagements, we propose that post-colonial novels have been uniquely poised not only to utilise and demonstrate various aspects of the discursive potential that fiction possesses, but also to perform in a singularly demanding way the question many critics and theorists seem to consider already answered--- regarding the 'death' of the novel. There seems to us to be only one test worth taking of whether the history of the novel is over, or whether History itself has terminated the novel. How much of the relentless interactivity of human beings in and as history in diverse trajectories, voices, and locations, can such narrative continue to include without imploding on its own contents? How fully the post-colonial novel can confront this doubt is everything that this study is about.

A Note about the Canon, and the Boundaries of our Study.

We will restrict ourselves to discussing selected African and Indian novels written in English as illustrative/representative of the 'post-colonial' in this study. It will become evident that it is the post-colonial novel, and the demonstration of the range of (stories and) issues raised by its diverse engagements with national existence in these societies, and not any particular novelist or national literature, that is the true protagonist and purpose respectively of this thesis. That is why this study is deliberately comparative, rather than organised under the sign of any one writer or country. It is meant to be guided and held together by its own themes and preoccupations leading to a demonstration of the novel's distinct nation-narrating capacities and the extent of its 'worlded' narrative engagement, and its discoveries and their implications.

Yet a suspicion of arbitrariness cannot of course be avoided. The novels I have picked seemed to me to contain complex, multi-layered responses to the themes of national becoming, out of my (inevitably limited) reading. Yet there is no effort to be exhaustive, only illustrative. Other works probably carry the points we make from out of these novels or dispute them, but that would not contradict our primary thesis-purpose, that of demonstrating the post-colonial novel's general capacity to evoke such a wide complex of worlded, formal, hermeneutic, historiographic, and theoretical issues simultaneously as they emerge from out of the depth and range of its narrative engagements with these societies.

Perhaps it would be easier to define at the outset what we imply in our use of the term 'post-colonial'. Broadly then, we intend to investigate only texts comprising narrative trajectories that occur *within* the geographical territories of certain African nation-states and India. Our interrogation will also be limited in time to novels involved with the *post-independence* phases of such histories, as opposed to those written after



independence but investigating pre-colonial pasts or the colonial period.¹⁸ These boundaries also imply that within the scope of this study we do not intend to investigate 'post-coloniality' in the sense of, for instance, themes to do with the hybrid postcolonial metropolis in Europe or the status of the postcolonial intellectual in the Western academy. Furthermore, implicit in comparative criticism is the acknowledgement of differences in the texts compared, and one of the primary critical methods of this study will be to make constant, mobile thematic connections between novels, theories, and histories without collapsing or subsuming radical heterogeneity under the same interpretative categories. We will also thereby be implicitly asking if these narratives of certain post-independence African societies and India display existential features, themes and details, that are mutually shared enough to justify being collectivised as 'post-colonial'? Or are these novels more specific both in form and content than such an overarching term could ever contain?

The Question of English?

Perhaps any note on the language restrictions defining this study needs to be prefaced with a qualification. We have clarified already that the 'worldly' implications (in the Saidian sense)--- of interrogating the extra-textual contexts and consequences of fictional production and consumption--- are not among our pre-occupations; that this thesis, for reasons of purpose as well as size, can only limit itself to discussing the 'inner worlds' and 'worldedness' of novels--- the depth and range of their engagement with national life, rather than studying novels as historical events in the worlds they arise from. The latter would clearly form the subject for numerous other alternatively premised studies, requiring historical, political and sociological research of the actual conditions surrounding these novels in their particular societies, in order to come up

¹⁸ There are three exceptions to these principles: *Burger's Daughter* by Gordimer, Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, and Rushdie's *Shame*. The first two are set during the apartheid era in South Africa; *Shame* is set in Pakistan (rather than India). In each case, the reason for our choice was their exemplary exposition of a range of themes essential to our study of individual and social processes of decolonisation.

with ways of calibrating their social influence. Thus, without insinuating for a moment that the choice of a specific language over others is ever socio-politically neutral, we would have to insist that (for instance) debating extremely legitimate questions regarding the class boundaries of the readership for these fictions do not really fall within our purview. And so when Ngugi argues regarding “the whole area of literature and audience, and hence of language as a determinant of both the national and the class audience” (1986, 6), that European-language writing in Africa remains “caged within the linguistic fence of its colonial inheritance”, and that this is its “greatest weakness” (“the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language” (21-22)), it would require an expertise (and focus) different from our own to enter into prolonged debate with him.

Since it is not our purpose then to prove the depth of the ‘actual’ national impact these fictions have had on their societies, we have to accrue our ‘nation building’ credentials on different terms. The terrain upon which our study can and will implicitly take up debate throughout its course is that of the novels themselves. In a famous and extended polemic against the use of European languages in African literatures, Ngugi represents language as being one of the primary carriers of any culture: “the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (1986, 15). He then goes on to argue that there occurred under colonialism a “dissociation of the sensibility of [a] child from his natural and social environment, what we might call colonial alienation”:

The alienation became reinforced in the teaching of history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe.

This dissociation, divorce, or alienation from the immediate environment becomes clearer when you look at colonial language as a carrier of culture.

Since culture is a product of the history of a people which it in turn reflects, the child was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. He was being made to stand outside himself to look at himself. [...]

[Further], since culture does not just reflect the world in images but actually, through those very images, conditions a child to see that world in a certain way, the colonial child was made to see the world and where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition.

But obviously it was [made] worse when the colonial child was exposed to images of his world as mirrored in the written languages of his coloniser.

Where his own native languages were associated in his impressionable mind with low status, humiliation, corporal punishment, slow-footed intelligence and ability or downright stupidity, this was reinforced by the world he met in the works of such geniuses of racism as a Rider Haggard or a Nicholas Montserrat; not to mention some of the giants of Western intellectual and political establishment (17-18).

Combining this historical portrait with an analysis of the relationship between class and language persisting throughout post-colonial Africa, Ngugi makes a compelling case for what he sees as the inevitable lacks and limits in the content of European-language African fictions, written by and for the petty bourgeoisie:

Because of its indeterminate economic position between the many contending classes, the petty bourgeoisie develops a vacillating psychological make-up. [...] This lack of identity in its social and psychological make-up as a class, was reflected in the very literature it produced [...]. In literature as in politics it spoke as if its identity or the crisis of its own identity was that of society as a whole. The literature it produced in European languages was given the identity of African literature as if there had never been literature in African languages. Yet by avoiding a real confrontation with the language issue, it was clearly wearing false robes of identity: it was a pretender to the throne of mainstream African literature. [...]

In the process this literature created, falsely and even absurdly, an English-speaking (or French or Portuguese) African peasantry and working class, a clear negation or falsification of the historical process and reality. This European-language-speaking peasantry and working class, existing only in novels and dramas, was at times invested with the vacillating mentality, the evasive self-contemplation, the existential anguished human condition, or the man-torn-between-two-worlds-facedness of the petty bourgeoisie (22).

All of which leads Ngugi to his well known conclusion: "African literature can only be written in African languages, that is, the languages of the African peasantry and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the coming inevitable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism" (27).

Such accusations--- of class hegemony leading to exclusions and misrepresentations that combine to form a distorted national picture--- are closely comparable to those levelled often against English-language literature in India, both by commentators sharing and others outside of Ngugi's particular ideological convictions;¹⁹ and taken

¹⁹ Salman Rushdie lists some of the more common charges: "its practitioners are denigrated for being too upper-middle-class; for lacking diversity in their choice of themes and techniques; for being less

together, they constitute a fundamental challenge to our project. Would all the inclusive qualities we have claimed on behalf of fiction in general, and the post-colonial nation-building novel specifically, founder on the choice of language? Within these contexts, would the adoption of English with its related socio-ideological implications affect (distort) the content of such novels to the extent that they are cut off at source from all their plastic, radically reinscriptive, exploratory potential? And yet, such questions beg their inevitable corollaries: are we not re-asserting that language can be a guarantor of an untranslatable 'authenticity', and conversely, that the adoption of a European language (which to such critics can never be indigenised or re-directed in any meaningfully comprehensive way), automatically and rigidly determines the ideological attitudes and social range portrayed within a text? Is there not implied various modes of essentialism in premising the range and quality of novelistic depiction achieved *a priori* upon factors such as language, or even the class of the writer and his readership?

Ngugi clarifies that while a "writer's handling of the material [is] affected by his material base in society, that is his class position and standpoint", this "does not necessarily produce good or bad writing, or rather a consciously held outlook does not necessarily make for bad or good writing" (78). Of course, Achebe implicitly disagrees with Ngugi's position when he defines a "national literature" as being "one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory" (1975, 56), "in other words a literature that is written in the *national* language", only to argue that in the multi-ethnic nation-states comprising most of Africa, English and other European languages, for better or for worse, are often the only national languages. Rushdie adds another dimension to this position when he posits that "one of the most absurd aspects of this quest for national authenticity is that [...] it

popular in India than outside India; for possessing inflated reputations on account of the international power of the English language, and of the ability of Western critics and publishers to impose their cultural standards on the East; for living, in many cases, outside India; for being deracinated to the point that their work lacks the spiritual dimension essential for a 'true' understanding of the soul of

is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure unalloyed tradition from which to draw" (1991, 67). And he also affirms the further consequence of his non-exclusivist vision of Indian reality, that "in his own case" as with various others, "knowing and loving the Indian languages in which [he] was raised has remained of vital importance [...], an essential aspect of [his] sense of self": "as a writer I have been partly formed by the presence, in my head, of that other music, the rhythms, patterns, and habits of thought and metaphor of my Indian tongues" (Rushdie & West, 1997, xvi).

But neither of these arguments, though valid in themselves, really confront the class-based charges of exclusion, misrepresentation, and hegemony, that for Ngugi are almost inevitable consequences of the alienation brought about by the adoption of a European language in a post-colonial setting. We concede that we could never satisfactorily settle such a charge by any means of theoretical argument. But the substance of our entire study, that will demonstrate the range of national voices, subjects, locations, and issues investigated by (some) English-language novels of Africa and India, will implicitly refute his contentions. It is far removed from our intention to set up any manner of adversarial relationship between English-language literatures and the other literatures of these societies: after all, any argument based on Bakhtinian premises must inevitably recognise that the richness of social heteroglossia achieved within a novel can only be enhanced by even more nuanced attention to the varieties of language employed throughout a nation (though Ngugi himself concedes that this does not mean all African-language writers are necessarily 'good' at achieving this). And besides, novels in *any* language that succeed in fictionalising a wide range of their national life would only illustrate our general thesis better, since we emphatically do not argue that English-language novels accomplish such national engagement more successfully than other literatures. Finally, contrary to Ngugi's pessimism, we will

India; for being insufficiently grounded in the ancient literary traditions of India (Rushdie & West,

demonstrate that the very struggles (political, ideological, class-based) that he believes are obscured or ignored by the English-employing classes of these societies, are actually performed within their novels as part of Bakhtinian enactments of the struggles defining all communication:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...], but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. [...] Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process (Bakhtin, 1996, 293-294).²⁰

I have used writing in English for simple purposes of self-definition and limits, and also due to the fact that apart from literature in Bengali, Hindi and French, all other writing from India and Africa would be closed to me personally except in translation.²¹ But neither can I accept Ngugi's implication that English-language literature in these societies is necessarily doomed to the boundaries of subject and perspectives that he outlines. It requires a very rigid, unchanging view of the social and aesthetic implications of using a language, a view in which particular realities remain as elusively untranslatable from one medium to another as its users (the writer and his readership) are mechanistically defined by the boundaries of their class: after all, by the same criteria, could an international readership (like our own) unfamiliar with the life and languages of a particular society ever have any basis for forming their own inevitably 'translatory' interpretations of texts? We will establish (ironically using Ngugi's own

1997, xiii)

²⁰ In this regard, see especially our studies of *Maru* and *Life and Times of Michael K* in Chapters 7 and 9 respectively.

²¹ Which would form a fascinating comparative exercise, though again it would have to deal with questions of translatability and untranslatable 'authenticity'. Unfortunately, wide-ranging enough as it already is, this can only be a study limited in size: therefore we have chosen to define our limits using the English language as a basis.

fictions as outstanding examples) that 'the English language [is] able to carry the weight" (Achebe, 1975, 62) of as diverse a range of African and Indian experiences as the novel form is capable of including. Perhaps our choice of language is not so arbitrary after all: if we can prove the depth and range of engagement of such fictions, it would only strengthen our case for the flexibility and re-inscriptive potential implicitly offered by the novel, even in a language with as tainted a colonial legacy and (in many ways) questionable post-colonial perpetuity as English.

Section 2: The Post-Colonial Novel as National Narrative.

Tolstoy, History, and the Novel's Capacity for 'Narrative Calculus'.

Throughout the narrative of *War and Peace* and as the focus of its second epilogue, Tolstoy inserts essays reflecting on both the 'causes' behind the unfolding of history, as well as passages of historiographic/hermeneutic meditation on how such an immense, dynamic interactivity of human becoming is to be interpreted. His immediate purpose is to comprehend what forces could have motivated millions of people, both Russian and French, in the Napoleonic campaign of 1812-13, to perpetrate "against one another such innumerable crimes, frauds, treacheries, thefts, forgeries, issues of false money, burglaries, incendiarisms, and murders, as in whole centuries are not recorded in the annals of all the law courts of the world, but which those who committed them did not at the time regard as crimes? What produced this extraordinary occurrence? What were its causes" (1942, 663)? But by the time of the epilogue, the scope of his questions have become more general: "what is the power that moves peoples" (1308)? "What force moves the nations" (1309)?

He goes on to consider and reject several kinds of all-encompassing explanatory narratives: first, the "biographical historians" for whom "events occur solely by the will of a Napoleon, an Alexander, or in general the persons they describe" (1309).¹ But then he also refuses as inadequate the versions of "the so-called historians of culture" (1311) who would attribute for instance, the events of the French revolution entirely to the influence of poets and philosophers, "in what is called culture--- in mental activity"(1311), such as the ideas of Voltaire and Rousseau:

¹ "Instead of men endowed with divine authority and directly guided by the will of God, modern history has given us either heroes endowed with extraordinary, superhuman capacities, or simply men of very various kinds, from monarchs to journalists, who lead the masses" (Tolstoy, 1942, 1305).

Of the immense number of indications accompanying every vital phenomenon these historians select the indication of intellectual activity, and say that this indication is the cause. But despite their endeavours to prove that the cause of events lies in intellectual activity, only by a great stretch can one admit that there is any connection between intellectual activity and the movement of peoples, and in no case can one admit that intellectual activity controls people's actions, for that view is not confirmed by such facts as the very cruel murders of the French revolution resulting from the doctrine of the equality of man, or the very cruel wars and executions resulting from the preaching of love (1311). [...] Undoubtedly some connection exists between all those who live contemporaneously, and so it is possible to find some connection between the intellectual activity of men and their historical movements, just as such a connection may be found between the movements of humanity and commerce, handicraft, gardening, or anything else you please. But why intellectual activity is considered by the historians of culture to be the cause or expression of the whole historical movement is hard to understand (1312).

And finally with equal emphasis Tolstoy rejects both grand narratives based on overarching teleological abstractions, whether they are Hegelian expositions of "universal history" whereby modern historians have posited the "existence of a known aim to which these nations and humanity at large are tending" (1306), "or a definite explanation of the meaning of the force producing historical events and termed power" (1314):

Instead of the formerly divinely appointed aims of the Jewish, Greek or Roman nations, which ancient historians regarded as representing the progress of humanity, modern history has postulated its own aims--- the welfare of the French, German, or English people, or, in its highest abstraction, the welfare and civilisation of humanity in general, by which is usually meant that of the peoples occupying a small north-westerly portion of a large continent (1305).

In the second case, he goes on to define power provisionally "as the collective will of the people transferred, by expressed or tacit consent, to their chosen rulers" (1315).

But such a definition only opens up new questions and ironies:

Do palace revolutions--- in which sometimes only two or three people take part-- transfer the will of the people to a new ruler? In international relations, is the will of the people also transferred to their conqueror? Was the will of the confederation of the Rhine transferred to Napoleon in 1808? Was the will of the Russian people transferred to Napoleon in 1809, when our army in alliance with the French went to fight the Austrians (1316)?

And, so without an understanding of the ever-altering conditions under which “the will of the people” is to be considered as delegated to and expressed through one person, which could then explain why particular historical events evolved in the way they did, “power is [just] power: in other words, power is a word the meaning of which we do not understand” (1321).

Ultimately, in none of these exclusive explanations, and not even in all of them considered together, does Tolstoy find enough “component forces equal to the composite or resultant force” (1310), which is the fact of how “millions of Christian men professing the law of love of their fellows” (1306) were moved to go first eastwards, and then westwards, to murder one another.

Of course, closely related to the question of interpreting history is Tolstoy’s pre-occupation with narrating it, so that these essays are as much simultaneous meta-narrative reflections on his own novelistic practice ² as they are repudiations of one or other methods of historical analysis. He has already explicated the problem of attempting to extricate static strands of coherent and causal ‘history’ from out of the immense dynamic of becomings that he is trying to represent and can yet never situate himself outside of:

Absolute continuity of motion is not comprehensible to the human mind. Laws of motion of any kind only become comprehensible to man when he examines arbitrarily selected elements of that motion; but at the same time, a large proportion of human error comes from the arbitrary division of continuous motion into discontinuous elements. [...] To understand the laws of this continuous movement is the aim of history. But to arrive at these laws, resulting from the sum of all those human wills, man’s mind postulates arbitrary and disconnected units. The first method of history is to take an arbitrarily selected series of events and examine it apart from others, though there is and can be no *beginning* to any event, for one event always flows uninterruptedly from another.

² Arguably an instance of Linda Hutcheon’s self-reflexive “historiographic metafiction”, that recognises histories to be selective acts of interpretative constructions, practised within a ‘traditional, realist’ novel long before she ‘discovers’ and names the trend among her post-modern contemporaries.

The second method is to consider the actions of some one man--- a king or a commander--- as equivalent to the sum of many individual wills; whereas the sum of individual wills is never expressed by the activity of a single historic personage (909-910).

After articulating his dissatisfactions with the explanatory means and results of many separate branches of historiography, Tolstoy's alternative is to conceive of a manner of what we shall hereafter term 'narrative calculus', of which thereby his novel becomes a performance and a demonstration:

A modern branch of mathematics, having achieved the art of dealing with the infinitely small, can now yield solutions in other more complex problems of motion which used to appear insoluble.

This [...] admits the conception of the infinitely small, and so conforms to the chief condition of motion (absolute continuity) and thereby corrects the inevitable error which the human mind cannot avoid when dealing with separate elements of motion instead of examining continuous motion (909).

And then follow the implications of this analogy for the novelising of history:

Only by taking an infinitesimally small unit for observation (the differential of history, that is, the individual tendencies of men) and attaining to the art of integrating them (that is, finding the sum of these infinitesimals) can we hope to arrive at the laws of history (909-910). [...] To study the laws of history we must completely change the subject of our observation, must leave aside kings, ministers, and generals, and study the common, infinitesimally small elements by which the masses are moved. No one can say how far it is possible for man to advance in this way towards an understanding of the laws of history; but it is evident that only along that path does the possibility of discovering the laws of history lie (911).

War and Peace ranges over thirteen hundred pages following precisely such a method, and radiates outward from the aristocratic families and the inter-related spiritual, personal and historical adventures of his principal characters: soldiers' lives and high strategy in the French and Russian war-camps (including brief meetings with Napoleon himself), vast battles and retreats, encounters with prisoners and peasants and much more are juxtaposed to demonstrate the implications of attempting such a 'calculus'. The novel thereby performatively poses the question: should history be read as the

dynamic ‘sum’ of everything human? Should human elements and processes on various levels, as lived and experienced by diversely placed characters, including their ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ lives, be considered as entering into and making history? Paradoxically too, the narrative carries significant traces of all of the elements of historical analysis it individually repudiates: there are scenes with great generals and historical personages, as well as numerous discourses on ideas deliberating individual conduct as well as the general direction of a nation’s history. Of course, the significant difference from the approaches Tolstoy has rejected is that these are performed simultaneously, interactively and always provisionally within the novel, with no encompassing claim ever made on behalf of any one stratum of happenings as exclusively explaining the events of 1812-13. *War and Peace* is thus a Bakhtinian demonstration of how much social heteroglossia fiction can contain, how much dynamic national interrogation a novel can undertake, that yet at its end emphatically does not claim narrative resolution or interpretative finality for itself or any other approach.

This section, which is sub-divided into three chapters, will demonstrate (and is premised upon) the post-colonial novel’s realisation of the same formal potential that Tolstoy argues for and performs, its capacity to perform ‘narrative calculus’ by containing various co-existent themes and dimensions--- ethnicity, location, kinship, family, political systems, individual selves, cultural values, economic conditions--- all examined together in their interactive implications for a nation’s becoming. We will also at each stage consider various non-novelistic perspectives and theories on African and Indian national formation, as well as conflicts about questions of historiographic interpretation and narrative representation, and compare such conceptions as performed inter-relatedly in the fictions. For instance, the next chapter (Chapter 3) will be structured around a theoretical opposition--- between different points of view on precisely the novel’s capacity for ‘narrative calculus’, and two major branches of arguments about the

nation-representing implications of such discourse. As we have seen, Tolstoy never pronounces any full or final understanding of the events of fifty years before through the act of writing *War and Peace*, but in the chapters below we will also consider the much more positivist and unified knowledge- and purpose-yielding claims made on behalf of the novel (and its narratives of historical totalities and nations) by critics such as Benedict Anderson, Edward Said and Georg Lukacs. These will then be set against counter-arguments by Homi Bhabha, Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin (with the example of Tolstoy's work and ideas in the background); the viability of both positions will be examined through our readings of chosen fictions, and by the conclusion the nation-narrating implications of each of these perspectives will be compared and evaluated.

Chapter 3: National Narratives: 'Performative' or 'Pedagogic'?

Benedict Anderson, and the Nationalist Novel of "Sociological Solidity".

Benedict Anderson famously attributes a central role to the novel in helping to narrate the foundations of European nationhood. Besides the fact that novels were written in one language and not another (after print-capitalism had already codified and standardised some dialects at the expense of many others), which thereby created an automatic and particular community of readership, there are two major narrative ploys he locates at the very basis of fictionalising which he interprets as crucial to how people come to imagine themselves as national communities. The first is to do with the fashioning of the novel's landscapes, which in various European and non-Western examples Anderson finds fully, vividly peopled but also with horizons "clearly bounded" (1991, 30). It is only England that is so comprehensively evoked in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, for instance, and Spain in *Don Quixote*: for all their free-ranging movement, neither novel is a "*tour du monde*" (30). To Anderson, these (and other) picaresque narratives are unambiguous on this matter:

We see the 'national imagination' at work in the movement of a solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. This picaresque *tour d'horizon*--- hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negroes--- is nonetheless not a *tour du monde*. The horizon is clearly bounded [...]. Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of plurals. For they conjure up a social space full of comparable prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative of [...] *this* [particular nation] (30).

And related to his idea about a novel's specified spatial limits, Anderson underlines the narrative- (and consequent) nation-building importance of a sense of 'shared' time. He theorises the significance of another of fiction's fundamental ontological assumptions, that of "homogeneous, empty time" (24), which opens up the realm of the 'shared simultaneous' that the "communities" represented in both novels and "imagined"

nations require. Anderson demonstrates how such a conception creates the zone of “temporal coincidence” which all such paradigms use to narrate landscapes and communities in their respective worlds, “in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by pre-figuring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence and measured by clock and calendar” (24).³ In Anderson’s argument, the crucial insertion in both cases, in the inner world of the novel’s narrative as well as the world in which exists the reader, is the sense of ‘meanwhile’, which together with the familiar spaces and characters being written about, “gives a hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community, embracing character, author and reader, moving onward through calendrical time” (27). He provides as an example the opening to an Indonesian novel in which a young man reads a newspaper report about the very town that he lives in, to illustrate how such spatially particular and temporally shared representations co-operate in constructing a sense of nationhood for an ‘imagined community’ of readers who participate in the same world through the activity of reading about it. The young man inside the novel would feel a “broad, horizontal comradeship” with millions of other fellow countrymen because of the certainty that they are reading the same newspaper as he is, as much as with the anonymous destitute vagrant (another fellow countryman) that he reads about and feels sympathy for.⁴ And, by extension, “we-the-Indonesian-readers are [also] plunged immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape; some of us may well have walked those ‘sticky’ Semarang roads” (32).

³ As opposed to the ‘Messianic time’ Anderson postulates as being the prevailing pre-modern temporal paradigm, borrowing the term from Walter Benjamin and the conception from Erich Auerbach, which assumes “the simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” (1991, 24) under the omnisciently unifying gaze of God.

⁴ Anderson posits that newspapers derive from and consolidate on a daily basis the same ‘imagined’ conception of a community inhabiting a shared contemporary, as does the novel:

Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly replicated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. As with [novels], fiction seeps quietly and

Anderson argues that novels powerfully impress upon imaginations in the early stages of national consciousness a conception of a shared nationhood, by narrating a recognisably particular, contemporary world in a particular language. This has dual and related nation-imagining implications: the very act of reading about it confirms one's participation in the vibrant but specific world within the novel (which is also the world one knows), as well as with an imagined community of readership in that outside world, which by such means is thus set on its way to becoming an 'actual' nation.

Edward Said, and the Bourgeois Determinism of Narrative.

Leela Gandhi is right in stating how "in general, post-colonial theory subscribes whole-heartedly to Benedict Anderson's insistence upon the textual underpinnings of nation-ness" (1998, 151). In *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said brings out more historically specific aspects and further dimensions to Anderson's argument. We have seen in a different context in the previous chapter his demonstration of the novel's "institutional character" (1993, 82), and how it is "fundamentally tied to bourgeois (and capitalist, nationalist, imperial) society" (82). Said finds the eighteenth and nineteenth century European novel to be "an incorporative, quasi-encyclopaedic cultural form, packed into [which] are both a highly regulated plot mechanism and an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power" (84). Not only does it derive from such foundations, he argues, any novelistic vision in Victorian England is moreover part of "the normative pattern of social authority" (84), that helps reinforce and consolidate such authority by "projecting" a "knowable community" and shaping the "idea of England in such a way as to give it identity, presence, [and] ways of reusable

continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations (35-36).

articulation" (85), thereby gaining an "important [...] place in the 'condition of England' question" (85). And novels are not just homogenising in this regard, they are also conservative: "the nineteenth century English novels stress the continuing existence (as opposed to revolutionary overturning) of England" (88). For Said then, the "history of the novel" has "the coherence of a continuous enterprise" whose "'consolidated vision' came in a whole series of overlapping affirmations, by which a near unanimity of view was sustained" (90). In near-Andersonian terms he elaborates:

The crucial aspect of what I have been calling the novel's consolidation of authority is not simply connected to the functioning of social power and governance, but made to appear both normative and sovereign, that is, self-validating in the course of the narrative. This is paradoxical only if one forgets that the constitution of a narrative subject, however abnormal or unusual, is still a social act *par excellence*, and as such has behind it the authority of history and society. There is first the authority of the author--- someone writing out the processes of society in an acceptable institutionalised manner, observing conventions, following patterns, and so forth. Then there is the authority of the narrator, whose discourse anchors the narrative in recognisable, and hence existentially referential, circumstances. Last, there is what might be called the authority of the community, whose representative most often is the family but also is the nation, the specific locality, and the concrete historical moment (92).

Anderson's account emphasises mostly the benevolent and creative aspects of how narrative helps fashion such an imagined sense of "broad, horizontal comradeship" and "sociological solidity" (425).⁵ Of course we can extrapolate from our discussion in the opening section of this study, that where Said diverges from Anderson is in the extent of his doubts about the ultimate creativity, radicalism and 'benevolence' of such a process, when he considers the imperialist, exploitative underpinnings and assumptions of all such eighteenth and nineteenth-century national and narrative projects. But he agrees almost entirely with Anderson's basic premises about the essentially affirmative and homogenising role narration plays in national self-imag(in)ing, which to us (as it does to Said) would make all novels part of a class-bound, conservative, at best complacent and at worst clearly coercive, 'majoritarian'

literature, in a Deleuzian sense, with seriously debilitating implications for post-colonial writing.⁶ Yet if we have given so much room to elaborating these particular positions on the relationships between novelistic narratives and nations, it is only to be able to bring out our fundamental reservations against them more clearly. While taking nothing away from the particular points Said⁷ and Anderson make about novels lending imaginative (and imaginable) tangibility to both their material and their readers, we submit, and will establish presently through the study of novels by Ngugi, Nadine Gordimer, and Achebe, that such accounts are limited, reductive and ultimately misleading. Their arguments about the implications of shared languages, environments and links between the world of the text and the reader's world around him are in themselves valuable, but to stop there is to fall short of discussing more than half the matter, and to risk missing out on the implications of analysing the actual, detailed content of a novel by privileging a summary of its most superficial formal conventions.

Refuting Saidian Determinism.

Our first objection is familiarly Bakhtinian. We will argue and demonstrate that the novel's ontological (and characteristic) capacity for performing social heteroglossia is irreducible to any one imperial author-intention or purpose, no matter what the actual author's intentions and purposes (we will see this established most clearly by contrasting the work of Ngugi as novelist with his other writings). The unresolved,

⁵ Not to mention *radical*, in the sense of helping create a whole new model of imagined political community (in the individual and collective mind as well as in the world), whether defined (in Europe) against medieval feudalism, or in non-Western territories against European colonialism.

⁶ Just to rapidly sketch some of the significant problems involved by way of an example, if we elect not to regard such narrativising as benevolently as Anderson does: in a society of any manner of diversity at all (i.e. India and most national societies in contemporary Africa), it would raise the question of who is performing (and sanctioning) the narrating of novels, and therefore promoting (or enforcing) a certain "homogeneous shared time"? Which 'non-horizontal' comradeships are being excluded in any such "horizontal" conception? At what un-represented expense is such a nation being 'built' and such a "coherent", "continuous" community being 'imagined'?

variously re-interpretable dialogic cacophony within the covers of his novels cannot be assumed to cohere into any single, monologic “normative pattern” or “continuous enterprise”. Tolstoy, who demonstrates the novel’s capacity to analyse various interactive dimensions of historical becoming through its performance of a ‘narrative calculus’, also emphasises that “no one can say how far it is possible for man to advance in this way towards an understanding of the laws of history” (1942, 911). He cautions us that all we are ever capable of is postulating “arbitrary and disconnected units”, and that “while laws of motion of any kind only become comprehensible to man when he examines arbitrarily selected elements of that motion”, “at the same time, a large proportion of human error comes from the arbitrary division of continuous motion into discontinuous elements” (909-910).

Besides, the further implications of both Said’s and Anderson’s descriptions, not just of the inner world of a novel but of its links to any and every reader, are of essentialising each of these separate entities--- author, work and reader--- as deterministically predictable in every instance. Yet we find embedded within Tolstoy’s nineteenth century, ‘realist’ novel profound levels of scepticism and caution about the problems of historical interpretation and representing, rather than another reiterative instance of the “consolidated vision” of a conservative and coercive social authority, which is broadly Said’s case against two centuries of novelistic work. Perhaps he would counter that his examples refer mostly to the English and French novel, but the Russia in which Tolstoy wrote his novel, even if it was not bourgeois-capitalist in the way of these two societies, also had an empire and a very conservative monarchy, and therefore many reasons to enforce both complacency and coercion. Our point is not that novels have never done this; we are arguing simply that they cannot be reduced to such a singular pattern. Through the various discussions that comprise this study, we

⁷ To challenge Said’s argument about *all* eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels being part of a “normative pattern”, and a “coherent” “continuous enterprise” of bourgeois, imperialist consolidation

will establish that any interpretative method derived for and from the novel's own unique discursive practices (whether envisioned as a Tolstoyan 'narrative calculus' or a Bakhtinian "sociological stylistics") uncovers numerous problems with any conception resembling an Andersonian "sociological solidity" or a Saidian "coherent enterprise". We shall thus attempt to demonstrate that such stylistics rarely confirm or encourage any convictions of such 'solidity'. Said himself issues the caveat:

When we read the novels attentively, we get a far more discriminating and subtle view than the baldly 'global' and imperial vision I have described thus far. [...] This obliges critics to read and analyse, rather than only to summarise works whose paraphrasable content they might regard as politically and morally objectionable (90-91).

And earlier, he has also stated that "for all their social presence, novels are not reducible to a sociological current and cannot be done justice to aesthetically, culturally, and politically as subsidiary forms of class, ideology, or interest" (87).

The textual extracts Anderson uses to make his case (for the novel's potential to create "sociological solidity" and "horizontal comradeship" through narrating readily recognisable times, places, and characters) are always (and only) openings from different novels, in which a milieu is being sketched in rapidly through general details of street-life, population, shared habits, and weather, in a way long established in realist practice. Hence they are in themselves perfect illustrations of his arguments. Yet while his ideas are demonstrable on this immediately identifiable level, we may also object that he considers his case proven before the novel has really begun, before its focus on a particular set of characters, situations, voices and perspectives has even started.⁸ In

through the detailed study of specific fictions is tempting, but is matter enough for another thesis.

⁸ An analogous argument might apply against his example of the daily newspaper. Perhaps the date on top of the page, and the fact of so many disparate items being held within the same institutionalised sheets of paper, and the same newspaper being held in so many hands simultaneously, all demonstrably contribute to a certain level of 'imagined community', but what happens when this community of readers actually enters into the disparate details of some of the news-items within that shared newspaper? Is it really so sociologically solidifying and "horizontal" camaraderie-fostering to read of civil war, terrorist strikes, drought and famine, beauty pageants, cricket scores, and monsoon flooding (by way of examples) just because they are all within the pages of the same newspaper? In such a case the fact that all the readers (and the events) may be Indian is a

this chapter, we shall presently prove through the work of Ngugi that Anderson concludes with clear evidence of the novel (only) establishing a sense of “horizontal comradeship” through broad familiar generalities, because he concludes his analysis before the novel has even begun any of its particularising.

Homi Bhabha: Contrasting ‘Performance’ and ‘Pedadogy’ in National Narrative.

Homi Bhabha would classify the passages that Anderson exclusively privileges as “pedagogical”--- that dimension of nationalist discourse in which “‘the people’ are the historical ‘objects’ of a “continuist, accumulative temporality” that draws for authority on “pre-given or constituted historical origins *in the past*”, and attempts “repeatedly” to turn all “the scraps, patches and rags of daily life [...] into the signs of a coherent national culture” (1997, 145). Before we move on to considering the evidence offered by Ngugi’s novels themselves, Bhabha’s is an alternative theoretical articulation that we will introduce, of other possible interpretations of the novel’s narratives of a national contemporary. For him, there is an important splitting in the sign of ‘the people’ that he would consider ignored by both Anderson and Said. Bhabha’s counterpoint to their essentialist, static “imagined community” is a conception of a narrative as “performative”, a process of signification with the people as *subjects*, that erases “any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity” (145). It is “another time of *writing*” (141) that Bhabha calls for, which would, in Said’s own words, perform “the non-sequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity” (quoted in 1997, 141); “a ‘time’ of narrative that is disavowed in the

superficial formality, but the actual details are too mutually irreconcilable (and yet simultaneous) to allow most readers the complacent certainties of feeling that they belong to one nation bound in imagined ‘solidity’. Besides, how can the reactions of millions of readers be described as predictably convergent?

discourse of historicism where narrative is only [...] the medium of a naturalistic continuity of Community or Tradition” (151):

The people will no longer be contained in that national discourse of the teleology of progress; the anonymity of individuals; the spatial horizontality of community; the homogeneous time of social narratives; the historicist visibility of modernity, where “the present of each level (of the social) coincides with the present of all the others, so that the present is an *essential* section which makes the essence *visible*” (151).

In clear contrast to Anderson and Said, this thesis will argue that the post-colonial novel ontologically has the means, and a demonstrable record moreover, of enunciating and performing this alternative conception of non-homogeneous ‘national time’, and has in a great range of narratives repeatedly and variously undertaken the “difficulty” of the Fanonian task that Bhabha outlines: that of “writing the history of the people as the insurmountable agonism of the living, [and] the insurmountable experiences of struggle and survival in the construction of a national culture”(152). Bhabha insists that what he terms “cultural difference” “must not be understood as (merely) the free play of polarities and pluralities in the homogeneous empty time of the national community” (162). Bakhtin and Tolstoy (and as we will establish, Ngugi, Gordimer, Achebe and Rushdie) too would claim no such simplistic liberal resolution to the relentlessly contesting, interactive visions of thoroughly socialised heteroglossia that their novels perform and unleash. Also, where Anderson interprets the nation as coming to know itself through the immediately familiar contents and boundaries of the novel’s landscapes (that are thereby contrasted against all the otherness that presumably lies beyond), Bhabha, and we, will read the novelistic “performative” as splitting the nation within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its own “contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense locations of cultural difference” (148).⁹

⁹ Perhaps it is relevant to acknowledge that Bhabha locates his aspirations towards such ‘performative’ writing not in an actual ‘post-colonial’ national territory as we have defined it, but in and for the Britain he then inhabited. But we will demonstrate how his ‘metropolitan’ theory has been practised in African and Indian settings through their fictions long before his enunciation of it,

Bhabha's disagreements with Anderson over the irreducible multiplicities performed under the sign of the 'nation' inevitably extend to dissent over their conceptions of the novel.¹⁰ He quotes Walter Benjamin: "to write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living" (quoted in 1997, 161). For Bhabha therefore, far from reinforcing an imagined "homogeneous time" and "sociological solidity", the novel takes us to the incommensurable at the heart of the national everyday: the novel, if 'national' at all, may be read as the narrative of its disjunctures. It reveals the apparently "homogeneous" as being actually "non-synchronous" (161): it carries traces of all the violence, the elisions of memory, and the discontinuities that Ernest Renan reminds us constitute the obscured heart of the "daily plebiscite" that is national existence.

These then are the contesting propositions on the back of which we enter our examination of post-colonial national narratives in this chapter. Have they functioned as the inherited "derivative discourse" unchanged in form or 'purpose' from Said's picture of nineteenth-century bourgeois, capitalist/imperialist European novels, that operate monologically as coherent (and potentially coercive) consolidations of "the monumentality of historicist memory, the sociological totality of society, [and] the homogeneity of cultural experience" (Bhabha, 157)? Or are post-colonial novels rather more often versions of the "minority discourse" that Bhabha interprets as contesting "genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical

proving therefore that one does not have to be hybrid, emigrated or 'cosmopolitan' (in the sense of inhabiting a multi-ethnic London) to recognise the potential or the need for such narrative.

¹⁰ "Anderson fails to locate the alienating time of the arbitrary sign in his naturalised, nationalised space of the imagined community. Although he borrows his notion of the homogeneous, empty time of the nation's modern narrative from Walter Benjamin, he misses that profound ambivalence that Benjamin places deep within the utterance of the narrative of modernity. Here, as the pedagogies of life and will contest the perplexed histories of the living people, their cultures of survival and resistance, Benjamin introduces a non-synchronous, incommensurable gap in the midst of storytelling" (Bhabha, 1997, 161).

priority, [and that] acknowledges the status of national culture--- and the people--- as a contentious performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life” (157)?

De-Constructing ‘Communities’: The Experiments of Ngugi as Novelist.

In the context of the debate outlined above, the fictions of Ngugi wa Thiongo are particularly ambivalent, given how outspokenly certain he appears in anything non-novelistic he has written of exactly what ails Kenya, economically, politically and socially, and how things might be redressed,¹¹ and for the fact that he explicitly integrates the artist’s role in a post-colonial African society within his vision of the way towards socio-economic liberation. Like Achebe, Nadine Gordimer and many other African writers, Ngugi forefronts the question of literary ‘worldedness’: both in terms of novelists being a particular sort of historical agent themselves, and of their texts being a dynamic intervention in their society’s history. “African Art, we can generally say, used to be oriented to the community. And because of its public nature, culture, in its broad as well as its narrow sense, helped to weld society together” (1972, 7). He quotes W.E. Abrahams approvingly on the “integrative function of culture” in “traditional societies”:

By uniting the people in common beliefs, actions and values, culture fills with order that portion of life which lies beyond the pale of state intervention. [...] It fills it in such a way as at the same time to integrate its society, on the basis of common attitudes, common values. It creates the basis for the formulation of a common destiny and co-operation in pursuing it (7).

¹¹ E.g.: “The real snake was surely monopoly capitalism, whose very condition of growth is cut-throat competition, inequality, and oppression of one group by another. It was capitalism and its external manifestations, imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism that had disfigured the African past” (Ngugi, 1972, 45).

“We must break with capitalism [...]. Capitalism can only produce anti-human culture, or a culture that is only an expression of sectional, warring interests. African culture used to be most communal when and where economic life and the means of production were communally organised and controlled... My thesis, when we come to today’s Africa, is then very simple: a completely socialised

Ngugi's insistent socio-political certainties, as well as his reiterated emphases on creating "common values", attitudes and a "common destiny", are terms reminiscent of Anderson's thesis about the novel being useful as a pedagogical instrument in helping to build a nation's sense of "broad horizontal comradeship". Yet the principal characters of *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*, Mugo and Munira, within whose voices and self-justifying states of mind we spend large sections of the narrative, are both portrayed as cowards who would prefer to be as far away as possible from the tasks and burdens of either the struggle for freedom or the responsibilities of post-colonial nation-building. The reader is scarcely allowed any assumption of essentialist homogeneity about the rallying symbols of independence or national construction, primarily because large portions of both novels are refracted through Mugo and Munira's alienation and weariness. Both of them view social and historical responsibility as an intrusive obligation (almost as self-violation): Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat* insists on reading "events in his life as isolated", where things had been fated to happen at different moments" with one having no choice in anything "as surely as one had no choice on one's birth" (1970, 195). To him, even in the immediate aftermath of Kenyan Uhuru (independence), on the verge of the huge tasks of nation-construction and in the midst of celebrations and near-universal enthusiasm, "life itself seemed a meaningless wandering [where] there was surely no connection between sunrise and sunset, between today and tomorrow" (198). And yet Ngugi simultaneously foregrounds the irony of how he has become a much admired symbol of heroic resistance, when in truth, he actually betrayed Kihika to the police. Even at the time of doing so, his feelings are a mixture of panic, rage and self-pity at his own isolation, and what he sees as his victimisation, by Kihika, the events of his own life and by history itself; but playing his part in his country's freedom movement (or his

economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people, through the elimination of all exploitative forces, is necessary for a national culture" (12-13).

responsibility to his community) is nowhere on his list of concerns.¹² He defines his predicament only in the narrowest personal terms:

What shall I do, he asked himself. If I don't serve Kihika he'll kill me. [...] If I work for him the government will catch me [...] and they'll hang me. My God, I don't want to die, I am not ready for death, I have not even lived. Mugo was deeply afflicted and confused, because all his life he had avoided conflicts: at home, or at school, he rarely joined the company of other boys for fear of being involved in brawls that might ruin his chances of a better future. His argument went like this: if you don't traffic with evil, then evil ought not to touch you; if you leave people alone, then they ought to leave you alone. That's why, now, [...] Mugo only moaned inside, puzzled: have I stolen anything from anybody? No! Have I ever shat inside a neighbour's courtyard? No! Have I killed anybody? No! How then can Kihika to whom I have done no harm do this to me (221)?

Not only is there lacking any exultant sense of participating in a grand, Hegelian, historical trajectory that has finally arrived on the verge of national self-realisation, Mugo does not even feel part of his immediate community in the village. And yet he is frequently haunted by the consequences of his betrayals, even if they have not come to light as yet (and would never have, if he himself had not confessed them):

He was conscious of the graves beside the trench. He shuddered cold, and the fear of galloping hooves changed into the terror of an undesired discovery (195). [...] His lower lip dropped: he felt energy leave him. [...]. It is not me, he whispered to convince himself. It is not me, it would have happened... the murder of women and men in the trench [...]. Christ would have died on the cross, anyway. Why did they blame Judas, a stone from the hands of a power more than men? [...] Mugo saw thick blood dripping from the mud walls of his hut (199).

Mugo is clearly an unusual choice of central character for a novelist so explicitly committed to a self-defined cultural project of creating the basis for "a common destiny and co-operation in pursuing it" through outlining "common attitudes" and "common values" (1972, 7). But any conception of narrating a "sociological solidity" or a shared "homogeneous time" for the nation is further complicated when we see how such characters are neither alone nor singular in either novel in being

¹² For a very similar crossroads of external, historic expectations and inner despair and eventual betrayal with similar consequences, consider Razumov's situation in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*.

discontinuously placed within this apparently 'shared' moment of national liberation. In *A Grain of Wheat* Gikonyo recalls how there were numerous times while he was in detention when he would have gladly confessed whatever he knew about his comrades just to be allowed to return home to his wife:

You know a time came when I did not care about Uhuru for the country any more. I just wanted to come home. And I would have sold Kenya to the whiteman to buy my own freedom. I admire people like Kihika. They are strong enough to die for truth. I have no such strength. That's why in detention, we were proud of you, resented you and hated you--- all in the same breath. You see, people like you, who refused to betray your manhood, showed us what we ought to be like--- but we lacked true bones in the flesh. We were cowards (79).

To which Mugo, who of course has actually betrayed Kihika, honestly replies that "it was not cowardice. I would have done the same" (79). Karanja, because of his own history of willing and active collaboration with British rule, dreads the day the white man will finally hand over power. Also, both he and Gikonyo from their opposed positions desire the same woman, and this personal dimension works as another instance of a conflicting motivation that further undermines any possibility of a 'shared' national commitment. And the novel is full of other voices (including its women, and the parents of some of the freedom-fighters), who all broadly support Uhuru and look forward to the work of liberation that lies ahead, and yet are simultaneously haunted by various doubts, fears and disparate private histories, some of which resulted in them preferring to continue in complicity with the colonial status quo rather than risk losing loved ones in the struggle.

Thus, for a dedicated (and didactic) anti-colonial polemicist, the extraordinary choice, in terms of both structure and narrative volume, that Ngugi makes as a *novelist* is to situate so much of both narratives within an unresolved heteroglossia of disunited and discordant voices and perspectives (thus undermining any simplistic sense of a shared national moment), rather than devote them monologically to the heroic opinions and

stories of revolutionary martyrs such as Kihika. Nadine Gordimer writes of *A Grain of Wheat* that Ngugi “succeeds in placing the so-called Mau-Mau movement in the historical, political, and sociological context of the African continental revolution. [...] [It] is shown to be a terrible guerilla war in which freedom was won, and which brought with its accomplishment a high price for the people who waged it” (1973, 27). In fact, the Uhuru celebrations at the novel’s climax are narrated through frequent cross-cutting between disharmonious yet co-existent streams of consciousness within different characters, non-synchronous not only with each other but also with the external context of the significant ‘national’ occasion they are supposedly sharing. Karanja, Koinandu, Mumbi, Gikonyo and Mugo are all silently engaged in inter-related personal conflicts even as they participate in or watch the race, almost none of which have anything to do with either the immediate rejoicing or any long-term plans of communal ‘nation-building’. Thus, contrary to Anderson’s sense of the novel helping pedagogically to build a homogeneous “imagined community”, contrary even to his own declared aims as a participant in his new nation’s “common” culture, it is as though Ngugi were deliberately foregrounding the texture of co-existent discontinuities and traumas that comprise a single national moment.

Petals of Blood is even more explicitly structured, through a continual layering of private pasts and presents that are remembered and interpreted differently by different characters and then narrated in their own voices, to reveal how inter-related yet traumatically discordant their histories are for even this small ‘community’ of characters. As with Mugo in *A Grain of Wheat*, the character Ngugi spends most time narrating is the schoolmaster Munira, who has only come to Ilmorog to “forget his fears, his guilt, his frozen years” (1977, 16), because he feels that “some of us who had a schooling [...] tended to leave the struggle for Uhuru to the ordinary people, [...] but now with independence, we have a chance to pay back” (10). Yet he is still “fidgety” whenever anyone talks of the effects of colonialism or even current politics:

“he would ask yet other questions hoping for a conversation that would not make demands on him to choose this or that position in politics” (18). Just as with Mugo, so for this ‘protagonist’, life appears “a series of unconnected events” (49), and he feels similarly alienated even within this small village, “doomed to roam this world, a stranger” (18). Ngugi describes his near-constant state of mind:

He looked forward to the unwilling immersion into darkness. He would then be part of everything: the plants, animals, people, huts, without consciously choosing the links. To choose involved effort, decision, preference of one possibility, and this could be painful. He had chosen not to choose, a freedom he daily celebrated [...] (71).

Every major character in the novel remarks at some point how little they can ever know of anyone else, because “everybody has his own secret past” (160). Yet ironically Ngugi also constructs an interconnectedness of pasts between them whereby they have all been directly or otherwise involved in each other’s life-stories in various roles and periods. And because each of these connections has left these characters damaged in various ways rather than connected in any metonymic national fraternity, they move themselves and each other towards worse consequences, often in reaction to those shared pasts. These novels are thus the sites where Anderson’s and Bhabha’s differences on the nature of national narrative are ultimately refused a mutually satisfactory resolution. By juxtaposing many inter-related stories and perspectives within the same worlds (that represent symbols of the nation), Ngugi evokes performances of how a new Kenya searches for purpose and coherence--- the “perplexed”, “contemporary” Bhabhan performance of what Timothy Brennan has called “the national longing for form”. Yet some of the most important implications of such inter-relatedness are shown to be hauntingly unresolved, fractured private histories that lead to conflict and further damage, rather than any facilely persuasive “solidity” or “comradeship” that might have ensued (in an Andersonian conception) once the

common external enemy has left and the nation-building novelist has started his work in earnest.¹³

Ebele Obumsele argues that *A Grain of Wheat* is a “deeply divided work”: while on the one hand Ngugi’s own authorial approval might seem to reside with Kihika, his plot also seems to point towards “the futility and ironic contradictions of revolutionary nationalism” (Irele, Spring ’98, 140). *Petals of Blood* carries within its narrative even more clearly the tension between the nation-building novel’s dual roles as ‘performative’ as well as potentially ‘pedagogic’. There are many passages where we are offered straightforwardly didactic diagnoses by characters of post-colonial Kenya’s economic and social predicament, and what needs to be done to ensure meaningful and effective liberation. Ngugi also inserts a collective ‘we’ voice that begins many chapters with narratives not only of Ilmorog’s shared past and their contemporary condition, but also attempts to add a wider historic-mythic dimension by framing their story within a greater African saga. These voices are of course to be seen as deliberately pedagogic and attempting to narrate broad national/racial solidarities, but they never dominate the entire novel (they do not even make up half its pages). Rather, the pedagogic passages come embodied within the voices inhabiting the rest of the narrative, and are thereby shown to co-exist unresolved, despite the best intentions of some of the characters, with the actual performance of these inter-related yet conflicting lives. Byron Santangelo writes that these two novels reveal a “profoundly anti-nativist” conception “of how culture and collective identity are produced, [...] in that [they] suggest they suggest neither is fixed and that both evolve in a reciprocal relationship” (Irele, Spring ’98, 147). Frederick Buell argues that *A Grain of Wheat* “attacks the very notion that an originary, essential African culture which could be returned to even exists”. A truly

¹³ For another example of participation in a war of national liberation and its variously ambivalent post-colonial legacies, consider Shimmer Chinodya’s *Harvest of Thorns* set in post-independence Zimbabwe.

post-colonial Kenyan nation necessitates the forging of a culture and consciousness through an evolving history “defined by the interrelated histories of its members” (Irele, Spring ’98, 147). We do not intend at all to deny Ngugi’s constant emphasis on the impact of historical and material conditions on individual existence and vision (and we return to his exploration of these dimensions in the next chapter). Yet we hope to have demonstrated that there is a clear slippage between Ngugi the dialogic novelist¹⁴ and Ngugi the monologic nationalist,¹⁵ and that the novels reflect this tension throughout--- between the ‘pedagogue’ trying to inspire mass uprising and change, and the novelist in “performance”, where most of his characters refuse to be encompassed by his own doctrines. Both novels allow in and perform too many other perspectives, too much irreducible heteroglossia, for either any one homogenising myth of history, or a single coercive political doctrine or ‘majoritarian’ conception of community, to emerge as their nationalist moral. And it is in this sense that his work is closer to Bhabha’s ideal of acknowledging the status of national culture and “the people--- as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogic [nationalist] representations of the fullness of life” (1997, 157).

Can Nations Learn From Their Novels?

As part of a book on Salman Rushdie, Timothy Brennan adds to Anderson’s conception of how the novel has historically worked as the blueprint and the embodiment of a “national longing for form”, by actually reversing some of his central propositions, and building instead on a Bakhtinian vision of the novel as the unique

¹⁴ In fact, it is not only co-existent yet contradictory Kenyan voices that are performed together in this extremely dialogised novel: Ngugi even allows the unfolding of the voices and self-examining, self-justifying streams of consciousness of British colonists within the same narrative.

¹⁵ Later on, Ngugi has admittedly gone on to write fictional narratives in a much more unambiguously monologic vein, such as *Matigari*, where the binaries of righteous and wronged, justice and injustice are unambiguously depicted. Of course monologic novels are also possible, when framed solely within the perspective of a didactic central character, and Ngugi, writing by now in

discursive terrain for the performance of ceaseless 'polyglossia'. If we accept, as Ernest Gellner has famously asserted, and Brennan affirms by quoting him, that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness" but rather "it *invents* nations where they do not exist", (quoted in Brennan, 1989, 9), then according to Brennan, it was the novel "that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the 'one, yet many' of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles" (9). He argues that it was in the novel that "previously foreign languages met each other on the same terrain, forming an unsettled mixture of ideas and styles, themselves representing previously distinct peoples now forced to create the rationale for a common life". Brennan thus redirects the implications of Bakhtin's work from the text back into the world it arises from, by arguing that this narrative capacity for "heteroglossia" "implicitly" answered how Europe was to prevent a "continual, chaotic splintering" of former empires and papal realms, by "objectifying" in its very form "the nation's composite nature" (10). Further, he argues, in the novel's hands 'tradition' becomes an "useable past", "and the evocation of deep, sacred origins---instead of furthering unquestioning, ritualistic affirmations of a people (as in epic)---becomes a contemporary, practical means of creating a people" (9).

Brennan's synthesis thus brings Anderson and Bhabha together: to him, the novel is pedagogic *because* of being "performative" in its unique Bakhtinian way. By embodying and performing "a hodgepodge of the ostensibly separate 'levels of style' corresponding to class; a jumble of poetry, drama, newspaper report, memoir and speech; a mixture of the jargons of race and ethnicity" (10), it demonstrates to the various members of the nation that if they can co-exist interactively within one textual narrative, perhaps they could inhabit history together as well under the rubric of a single

Gikuyu and translating his own work into English, has argued that this is currently the most effective way to be of service to the cause of social liberation.

nation. Chinua Achebe has himself spoken of a dual role as novelist and “teacher” within his society: “the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front” (1988, 30). And Bhabha too has written of the possibilities of political solidarity arising from his envisioning of ‘performative’ ‘minority discourses’.¹⁶ These are positions we shall revisit at the conclusion of this thesis, but for now, we reserve judgement on both the nature and the extent of the novel’s capacities for nationalist pedagogy. So far, all we have established is that novelistic narrative treats its heteroglossic material in ways irreducible to any single, pre-determined, coercive purpose, against what Anderson and Said contend above. Yet, in the next two chapters and indeed over the course of this study, there remain many more extremely ‘performative’ and thoroughly ‘worlded’ instances of narrative engagement to be considered in our survey of fictional treatments of the various agents, processes and dimensions that comprise post-colonial national becomings.

Embodying and ‘Worlding’ Polyglossia.

For instance, in his novels it is not just the “incommensurable” incompatibilities of private perspectives and histories that Ngugi uncovers as the fundamental problem hindering a collective national becoming. If that were all fiction could establish, it would not amount to much more than a restatement of basic, ‘derivative’, Western liberal-individualist principles, certainly not the comprehensively dynamic multi-dimensional social examination Tolstoy and Bakhtin claim that the novel is capable of. As Bhabha puts it: “the perplexity of the living must not be understood (merely) as some existential, ethical anguish of the empiricism of everyday life in the ‘eternal living

¹⁶ “Now there is no reason to believe that such marks of difference cannot inscribe a ‘history’ of the people or become the gathering points of political solidarity” (Bhabha, 1997, 157). [...] For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity” (170).

present” (1997, 157). For fiction, no present can be ‘eternal’ if it is indeed living, and there is much more to what novels uncover about diverse beings inhabiting nations than any conception of purely private histories in worlds that remain static around selves. We established in the opening chapter that for the novel, narrating the stories of selves is epistemologically inseparable from narrating the worlds they are always inextricably immersed in. The relationship is implicitly dialectical: what are selves, the novel asks, and how are we to interpret these beings in bodies in worlds? Kundera reminds us that “to exist means: ‘being-in-the-world’. Thus both the character and his world must be understood as possibilities” (1990, 42):

Man does not relate to the world as subject to object, as eye to painting; not even as actor to stage set. Man and the world are bound together like the snail to its shell: the world is part of man, it is his dimension, and as the world changes, existence (being-in-the-world) changes as well (35).

Thus, for fiction, every conceivable existential dimension, everything that could be part of a human situation, “becomes theme (existential questioning)” (1996, 165). For Kundera, we have seen, the novel must examine history not only in how it creates “revelatory existential situations” (1990, 36) for its characters, but also “history itself must be understood and analysed as an existential situation” (38). And as we saw in the case of Leopold Bloom or Joseph K, so it is with the characters and worlds of post-colonial fictions: the Tolstoyan ‘narrative calculus’ of the novel dissolves, or at least throws into crisis, any such simple distinctions and binaries (between historic and private, social and personal), in its interactively dynamic, entirely ‘worlded’ visions of human becoming.

Basil Davidson quotes Marc Bloch to argue that “historical facts [...] are in their essence psychological facts”. He continues:

History in other words is not a calculating machine. It unfolds in the mind and the imagination, and takes body in the multifarious responses of a people’s

culture, itself the infinitely subtle mediation of material realities, of underpinning economic facts, of gritty objectivities (1978, 205).

In Ngugi too, the disparate conflicting voices are shown to arise from selves embodied in and shaped by many other co-influential social, political and material dimensions, such as ethnicity, cultural values, class divisions, State structures, physical location, economic models, and gender. We have argued that when the post-colonial novel undertakes to perform social heteroglossia, it simultaneously initiates an interrogation of many levels of existential inquiry. In the next chapter we will examine the mechanics (and results) of such examination, as evidenced primarily in the work of Achebe and Ngugi, to evoke something of the range of multi-dimensional discussion that fiction is capable of containing, thereby filling out, extending and redefining our interpretative categories through each such performance of 'narrative calculus'.

Chapter 4: Examining Society Through 'Narrative Calculus'.

Conflicts Between Modernity, Individuality and Kinship in *No Longer at Ease*.

It appears initially that Obi in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* could not have come back from England with more determination to influence the future of his society (which is on the verge of political independence): "it was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name for him. That was the first great thing that England did for him" (1972, 13). He has strong familial loyalties as well as gratitude towards his community for sponsoring his education. Yet there has developed within him a coexistent loyalty to an idea of the multi-ethnic heterogeneity of Nigeria that is powerful enough to make him "argue very heatedly about [its] future" (20) with his friends, speak at a meeting of his kinsmen about "men who are prepared to serve her well and truly" (32), and lead him to wish that all Nigerians could have a common African language to unite them so that they would not have to use English. He feels "like a tiger" after refusing his first bribe: "he had won his first battle hands down [though] everyone said it was impossible to win" (87). He has even titled the only poem he has ever written 'Nigeria', and we are told that calling him "a stranger in his [own] country was the most painful thing one could say to Obi" (71-72).

But as Adewale Maja Pearce points out, perhaps Obi is "altogether too superficial to carry the burden of the rigorous moral choices which the author happens to foist upon him" (1992, 42). By immersing him in his new environment thoroughly and confronting him with various simultaneous, conflicting worlds and choices, Achebe rapidly exposes his naivete on many counts. Obi has a theory that it is only the older generation without "intellectual foundations to support their experience" (Achebe,

1972, 20), who perpetuate the disease of corruption within Nigerian society and that a new nation-building generation of meritorious civil servants would not require to be bribed. But such an analysis is proved hollow when he comes to realise for himself how easily unscrupulousness can be adopted as a social 'imperative'. Achebe also reveals how Obi's thinking on any social or public matter is never either committed or prolonged: once, after being castigated for trying to interfere in an incident of casual bribery, he re-considers the advisability of a democratic for a new Nigeria:

"What an Augean stable!" he muttered to himself. "Where does one begin? With the masses?" He shook his head. "Not a chance there. It would take centuries. A handful of men at the top. Or even one man with vision--- an enlightened dictator. People are scared of the word nowadays. But what kind of democracy can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance? Perhaps a half-way house--- a sort of compromise" (43-44).

And that is where his train of thought culminates, not because he has convinced himself of either position with any thoroughness, but because his mind, "not really in the mood for consecutive reasoning [...] was impatient to roam in a more pleasant landscape" (44). Obi's adolescent idealism is again exposed through his inability to marry Clara, when despite his determination to hold on to his individuality against the will of his community, his family and even his Western-educated urban friends, he has to confess to himself he cannot stir up the passion or the conviction to go through with any action, even though he is firmly convinced of his own moral and rational correctness:

His mind was troubled not only by what had happened but also by the discovery that there was nothing in him with which to challenge it honestly. All day he had striven to rouse his anger and his conviction, but he was honest enough with himself to realise that the response he got, no matter how violent it sometimes appeared was not genuine (137).

Nadine Gordimer traces Obi's downfall to his "extending himself docilely on the rack of bourgeois values his society has taken over from the white man; values totally unreal in the economic and social conditions of that society" (1973, 23). She continues, in a critique of his unquestioning acceptance of the external signifiers of urban modernity:

It is not that Obi cannot do his work efficiently; but that he accepts the necessity for the trappings of a European bourgeois life that, during a European administration, went along with it. Even the obligation to support his family is not measured in accordance with their actual needs, but with what is thought to befit the family of a man who lives according to white collar values (23-24).

In tracing the development (and decline) of his protagonist, Achebe can narrate the existential implications of inhabiting disparate dimensions and worlds simultaneously, as well as portray Obi's inability to orient himself along so many contrary axes. We see enacted through him the effects of the conflicting demands of kinship and a wider loyalty to the new nation, and the confusions that result from inhabiting at least three different worlds at the same time without a deep enough understanding of or commitment to any: the world of obligations to his village and his kinsmen, the membership of a modern urban elite and its demands and temptations, and the individualist within Obi, who cannot balance these separate worlds and yet also would not surrender his will and freedom to his father or his community. Achebe implicitly critiques the superficiality of his professional principles: at first Obi derides the practice of using traditional proverbs to justify cowardice and sycophancy as evidence of a "colonial mentality". Yet one day not much later, when asked to start paying back his debts to his community, he thinks of defaulting on his car insurance as an act almost as "unthinkable as a masked spirit in the old Ibo society answering another's esoteric salutation" (98) by taking off his mask and breaking the sanctity of the ritual: "Obi admitted that his people had a sizeable point. What they did not know was that, having laboured in sweat and tears to enrol their kinsman among the shining elite, they had to keep him there" (98). Not paying his insurance premium within the context of the new urban world he now inhabits "would be letting the side down in a way that was quite unthinkable" (98).

Near the end, Obi relinquishes the mounting burdens of his responsibilities and mistakes by deciding that it is only the "impatient idealist" who says: "give me a place

to stand and I shall move the earth. But such a place does not exist. We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace” (166-7). Such formulations “release his spirit” until “he no longer [feels] guilt” (166). Maja Pearce finds it surprising that such a “miserable specimen of manhood [...] has sufficient backbone to contemplate resisting in the first place” (1992, 44). Similarly in *A Man of the People*, the protagonist Odili is condemned by him for his immorality, the corruption at the centre of his professed nation-building dreams. For Maja Pearce this makes the novel itself “partake of the corruption which the author otherwise imagines himself to be exposing” (36). Yet such a critique seems curiously blind to the interrogative possibilities Achebe opens up through narrating precisely such unreliable, immature, and flawed protagonists. (Perhaps Maja Pearce would prefer a ‘pedagogic’ national literature with model protagonists who can inspire commitment to nation-building, over a polyglossic literature that chooses to explore ‘performatively’ the various difficulties that are part of any such collective becoming). As Ngugi does with Mugo and Munira, such crisis-ridden central characters allow Achebe to examine the implications of inhabiting post-colonial Nigeria--- portrayed as the site of conflicting locations, systems and processes--- through their effects on certain selves. Also, such a strategy enables him to critique those selves, as well as dialectically interrogate the worlds, social structures, discourses and classes they inhabit, influence, and are shaped by, the unfolding of which is what we next examine.

Partha Chatterjee: Nationalism’s Cognitive Dichotomies.

Writing in Calcutta, Partha Chatterjee traces how a conception of an undamaged, ‘authentic’, and ‘timeless’ cultural and spiritual continuity was essential to the Indian nationalist project from its nineteenth-century inception. He disagrees strongly with Benedict Anderson’s suggestion that African and Asian nationalisms “have [had] to choose their ‘imagined community’ from certain ‘modular’ forms already made

available to them by Europe and the Americas” (1993, 5). Making clear that his objections are not for any “sentimental reasons” (5), Chatterjee argues “that the most powerful and creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the modular forms of the national society propagated by the modern West” (5). To him, theorists like Anderson miss crucial distinctions because they take the claims of post-colonial nationalisms as being purely political movements “much too literally and [...] seriously (5). Chatterjee uncovers another ‘domain’ that he terms the “spiritual”. According to him this was refashioned by nationalists in Asia and Africa “as an ‘inner’ domain” (6), and included the propagation of native-language literatures, education and media, the autonomous realm of the family, and the inviolable symbolic sanctity of the nation’s womenfolk. The nationalists now present this new “true and essential” domain as one where “the nation is already sovereign” (6), even when the state, its effective material control, and its ideologies are entirely those of the colonial power:

The material is the domain of the ‘outside’, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand is an ‘inner’ domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity. [...]

The colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the ‘inner’ domain of national culture; but it is not as though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being (6).

Yet Chatterjee does not direct his dissent towards any uncomplicated celebration of such radically ‘original’ nationalism, but rather utilises it as a premise upon which to mount a critique of such cognitive separation, the consequences of which he sees as being structural, socially pervasive and extending well into the post-independence contemporary. R. Radhakrishnan, commenting on Chatterjee, illuminates the self-

divisive implications of conceiving social existence, national identity, and historical agency within the terms of such a dichotomy:

[Thus] the place where the *true* nationalist subject *really is* and the place from which it produces historical-materialist knowledge about itself are mutually heterogeneous. The locus of the true self, the inner/traditional/spiritual sense of place, is exiled from processes of history while the locus of historical knowledge fails to speak for the true identity of the nationalist subject. The result is a fundamental rupture, a form of basic cognitive dissidence, a radical collapse of representation (Castle, 2001, 197-198).

In the section below, we transplant certain aspects of their diagnoses to our reading of Achebe's novels, and locate his performative illustration of similar nationalist failures, and the range of resulting social "ruptures" in his portraits of Nigeria on the verge of independence and soon after.

The Failure of Nationhood in *No Longer at Ease*.

In an interview, Achebe makes clear the scale of the disseminatory, nation-building effort that is required if various peoples within an African society are really to think of themselves as a 'nation': "something must be done, to make people feel they want to sacrifice their lives if necessary for this other unit, because it is so exciting, so powerful, so strong" (Irele, Fall '93, 64). He examines in his novels the possibilities of such national 'imagined communities' arising, and a range of assumptions and suspicions as well as entrenched structural and social divisions, that the various classes and ethnicities of the nation would have to overcome for this to happen. With extraordinary irony, he casts the aims which the UPU see themselves and their mission working towards in *No Longer at Ease* in terms immediately recognisable to any nation-builders working to fashion and disseminate a sense of shared nationhood within a new country. Obi's community and its self-helping representatives in the federal capital feel great pride in Umuofia's past, and often speak of themselves as "pioneers building up [their] families and their towns" (1972, 82), with historic responsibilities of duty and sacrifice

upon them. The tragicomic paradox of course is that it is precisely this clarity of ‘village-building’ purpose that renders them most unsuited to any wider national commitment. At one of their meetings, Obi’s nationally-oriented idealism utterly fails to ignite their Umuofia-oriented imaginations. They are aware in their own way that they are living through a “momentous epoch in [their] political evolutions” (32); hence the scholarship scheme to have as many village sons as possible educated and in high places. But Achebe simultaneously makes obvious that this heightened sense of inhabiting a historic turning point has nothing to do with any thought for their contribution to a national effort, just to ensure as much “national cake” gets to Umuofians as possible:¹⁷

He spoke of the great honour Obi had brought to the ancient town of Umuofia which could now join the comity of other towns in their march towards political irredentism, social equality and economic emancipation.

“The importance of having one of our sons in the vanguard of this march of progress is nothing short of axiomatic. Our people have a saying “Ours is ours, but mine is mine”. Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that of which it can say: “This is mine”. We are happy that today we have such an invaluable possession in the person of our illustrious son and guest of honour” (32).

Elsewhere, he further clarifies how “in Nigeria the government was ‘they’” (33), far removed from any real, ‘invented’ or ‘imagined’ conception of a “collective subject” that nationalist discourse aims for the population to feel part of (as we will see John Breuilly argue presently): “it had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people’s business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble” (33).

¹⁷ In *Destination Biafra*, one of Buchi Emecheta’s characters explains that this is why a “responsible person” in Nigeria necessarily enters politics: “[not] to introduce reforms but to get what one could of the national cake and to use part of it to help one’s vast extended family, the village of one’s origin, and if possible the whole tribe (1994, 16), the rationalisation being that “at least in this way much of the ill-gotten money returned to the society” (16).

Achebe traces carefully Umuofia's sense of itself in the 'alien' world around (which is the capital of their 'own' nation) to show the implications of such cognitive separation. In his novel, these alternatively defined communities based on ethnicity or kinship have aims that either *emerge* directly out of the cognitive and disseminatory failings of nationalist ideology similar to those Chatterjee points out in India (as well as disenchantment at the failings of its new economic and political structures and institutions), or they might be seen as more 'traditional' aims that are never transformed into newer, broader national objectives because of such failings. To the Igbos of Umuofia, Lagos is a strange land with alien gods, and they are only here to partake in any material opportunities that might ensue. Furthermore, the clarification that they are there for money and not merely to work hard is reiterated at one of their meetings in case any member has the wrong impression:

"It is money, not work [...] we left plenty of work at home. Anyone who likes work can return home, take up his matchet and go into that bad bush between Umuofia and Mbaino. It will keep him occupied to his last days". The meeting agreed that it was money, not work, that brought them to Lagos" (79).

Such a distinction, and a sense of advantage and benefit so narrowly defined seems to validate, almost necessitate, their corruption as a 'pioneer' responsibility. What Achebe makes also clear through such a delineation is that any symbolic terrain that could conceivably be occupied by ideologies of nationalism within the mental and emotional landscapes of Nigerians is already (or still) firmly in the grip of village, community, and family. It is only as and around Umuofians, or (at best) other Igbos, that these people feel any 'real' security, identity and a sense of past and future. And very crucially, such a sense is certainly not all 'invented' or 'imaginary' either; there is institutional and material underpinning that vindicates these emotional loyalties. We see how the weekly meetings of the UPU are a democratic forum where dissent is heard and voiced, and where members can count on seeking any manner of material or social assistance and seldom being denied. They even engage a lawyer for Obi despite all their

disappointment in him, “for as the President pointed out, a kinsman in trouble had to be saved, not blamed; anger against a brother was felt in the flesh, not in the bone” (5). Of course, the other implication of such a limited and clearly bounded sense of fraternity is obvious: as ‘Nigerians’ (or as Ngugi’s ordinary rural Kenyans), there are few such national institutions that they can appeal to or are even aware of. And as we have seen, even among Obi’s own educated, patriotic friends and his colleagues, the urban bureaucratic elite, the only one who does not advocate dishonesty as a social duty and redistributive necessity is his anachronistically imperialist British manager, Green.

Within an Indian post-colonial context, Chatterjee himself traces the consequences of such “cognitive dissidence [and the resulting] radical collapse of representation” of the new nation:

The continuance of a distinct cultural ‘problem’ of the minorities is an index of the failure of the Indian nation to effectively include within its body the whole of the demographic mass which it claimed to represent. The failure assumes massive proportions when we note [...] that the formation of a hegemonic ‘national culture’ was *necessarily* built upon a system of exclusions. Ideas of freedom, equality, and cultural refinement went hand in hand with a set of dichotomies which systematically excluded from the new life of the nation the vast masses of people whom the dominant elite would represent and lead, but who could never be culturally integrated with their leaders [...]. The inauguration of the national state in India could not mean a universalisation of the bourgeois notion of ‘man’ (1993, 134).

Are Nation-States ‘Material’ or ‘Emotional’ Entities?

Theorising primarily with reference to European national formations, Ernest Gellner has famously argued that nation-states are most importantly the minimum political unit that can generate the large-scale educational infrastructure required to create modern citizens--- those acceptably equipped to function in a modern, industrialising economy. This capacity, to Gellner, was their fundamental *raison d’etre*, rather than “the

awakening of an old, latent, dormant, force, though that is how it does indeed present itself" (1983, 48).¹⁸ He claims provocatively:

Contrary to popular and even scholarly belief, nationalism does not have any very deep roots in the human psyche (34). [...] Time was when education was a cottage industry, when men could be made by a village or clan. That time has now gone, and gone forever. [...] Exo-socialisation, the production and reproduction of men outside the local intimate unit, is now the norm, and must be so. The imperative of exo-socialisation is the main clue to why state and culture *must* now be linked, whereas in the past their connection was [...] often minimal. Now it is unavoidable. That is what nationalism is about, and we live in an age of nationalism (38).

So, to Gellner "nationalism is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself" (56). In his account, political activity that appears ethno-emotionally motivated is actually always a strategically mobilised demand for more social and economic participation and opportunity whenever it becomes obvious that such is being denied to a clearly identifiable group: there is nothing deeper to any such unity:

People really become nationalists because they find that in their daily social intercourse, at work and at leisure, their 'ethnic' classification largely determines how they are treated, whether they encounter sympathy and respect, or contempt, derision or hostility. The root of nationalism is not ideology, but concrete daily experience (Balakrishnan, 1996, 123).

But theorists such as Benedict Anderson, Anthony Smith, and John Breuilly variously contend that such absolutely rationalised, functional explanations do not take into account various dimensions of nationalism: its political, cultural and emotive effects, for instance. Smith has argued constantly and publicly against a Gellnerian position, reiterating that materialist, functionalist accounts always overstate the role of

¹⁸ See Gellner (1983, especially 32-38, and also 39-62).

Perhaps it is relevant to point out Edward Said's reservations about their Eurocentrism when discussing in non-Western contexts theorists such as Gellner, Hobsbawm and Elie Kedourie. Said detects "a marked (and [...] ahistorical) discomfort [in their work] with non-Western societies acquiring national independence, which is believed to be 'foreign' to their ethos. Hence the repeated insistence on the Western provenance of nationalist philosophies that are therefore ill-suited to, and likely to be abused by Arabs, Zulus, Indonesians, Irish, or Jamaicans (1993, 261). But part of our point is precisely that Achebe's fiction explores yet subverts aspects of such theories in its specific (and novelistic) attention to Nigeria.

industrialisation, capitalism and the need for unifying infrastructure, and reduce (or conflate) all nationalisms in disparate times, places and historical circumstances to mere ideological masking or pragmatic strategies for political mobilisation. According to Smith, “there is considerable evidence that modern nations are connected with earlier ethnic categories and communities and are created out of pre-existing origin myths, ethnic cultures, and shared memories; and that those nations with a vivid, widespread sense of an ethnic past, are likely to be more unified and distinctive than those which lack that sense” (1996a, 385).¹⁹ And so:

This myth of the modern nation has to be recognised for what it is: a semi-ideological account of nations and nationalism, one that chimes with modern preconceptions and needs, especially with those of a mobile, universalist intelligentsia [...]. It is as much a myth [...] as the myth of nationalism itself; and it should be treated with similar caution (1996b, 41).

Anderson attempts to demonstrate the emotional significance of belonging to a national narrative, that purports to provide each citizen with existential meaning and purpose, in a way religion (as well as the feudal class system) would have done in an earlier epoch.²⁰ Breuilly argues for a political theory of nationalism that views it as arising out of the mobilising of cultural and ethnic solidarities, because most of all it seeks to dissolve the dichotomy between the (Gellnerian) impersonal state and the living population, and represent the modernist nation-state as a collective, continuous, ‘organic’ entity where these two distinct spheres attain self-realisation and legitimise one another.²¹

¹⁹ See Smith (1998, 27-46) and (1996b, 29-50).

²⁰ See Anderson (1991, 9-12)

²¹ The Indian historian Sunil Khilnani argues a similar motive in the partition of the sub-continent: “for those who wished to separate and establish their own state, the promise of partition was the promise of a state made less alien” (1998, 203). In a more general vein he continues:

Since the end of the 18th century, all efforts to make the state less impersonal have invoked the idea of the nation: a form of solidarity usually specified in terms of a common religion, language, culture, race or history. It does not require too much historical delving to demonstrate the fictive, spurious character of all nations; and yet no modern idea has managed to summon up stronger, if erratic, feelings of identification with the alien apparatus of the state (203).

“Logically the two concepts of the nation--- a body of citizens and a cultural collectivity--- conflict. In practice, nationalism has been a sleight-of-hand ideology which tries to connect the two ideas together” (Balakrishnan, 1996, 166).

Yet, as we argued from the parable from *The Trial* in our opening chapter (and how it can evoke disparate critical responses and hermeneutic horizons simultaneously without being reducible to any one explanation, a capacity we posited as being characteristic of novelistic narrative) Achebe also manages to perform in his novels aspects of such opposed theoretical positions together. If a Gellnerian infrastructural modernisation is what ‘all’ modern nations really are for, then Achebe implicitly narrates the failure of the Nigerian state to perform any such restructuring function in society. It hardly occurs to his Umuofians that the state is meant to provide them with regulated facilities and infrastructure, or anything more than the opportunistic pickings gathered by their kinsmen in the capital. But he goes further and makes evident that the utter failure of the state’s emotional appeal as an ‘imagined community’ is inextricably *related* to its failures in the material sphere to provide enabling opportunities for its citizens. He thus demonstrates a more complex scenario in both his novels--- for which aspects of the various theoretical positions above have to be utilised interpretatively together, rather than as mutually exclusive ‘options’--- in how his characters consistently turn to local and ethnic affiliations for moral, cultural *as well as* material and institutional support. Achebe establishes that if kinship and ethnicity command primary loyalty, this does not arise just out of the fact of a shared birthplace and traditions, but is reconfirmed each time his characters find they can rely on the UPU for material support in any way they might require.

Perhaps this was part of Hegel’s project in the 18th century itself; an attempt to ‘humanise’ the new political structures and paradigms he saw evolving around him, by discovering in the nation-state the final philosophical and historical consummation of earthly existence.

Where *No Longer at Ease* focuses on the institutional and structural failures of the fledgling, nearly post-colonial Nigerian state, and relates them to their accompanying cognitive and emotional causes and implications, *A Man of the People* (set five years after independence) extends its investigation to the new nation's politics. Again, as we next demonstrate, by a similar strategy of narrating selves-in-worlds as a confluence of various agents, classes, processes and structures, Achebe's novel dramatises and can explore many simultaneous dimensions relevant to his society's becoming.

National Politics and Class Divisions in *A Man of the People*.

As with Ngugi's much satirised members of the new political and economic elite in *Petals of Blood*, Raymond Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo, who are portrayed as venal, treacherous, lustful, and murderous, Achebe's chief Nanga is an easily recognisable portrait of the new leadership in a post-colonial African state, in his frequent, ruthless and rapid lapses into greed and corruption. He engineers elections, and organises rioting in towns and villages whenever his political calculations so require; he lives in great, imported luxury, and sells off the nation's assets to foreign companies in return for huge "dashes". Achebe reveals how Nanga manipulates political life both at a parliamentary level as well as in his own constituency, where he energetically plays the ethnic card and promises his voters ever larger shares of the "national cake", and yet blackmails his own community by taking away the water pipes he has promised them when their support threatens to turn against him.²²

²² In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon sketches a portrait that anticipates at length and in near-novelistic detail the evolution of this political class after the achievement of independence. See Fanon (1985, 122-144).

Yet it is the protagonist Odili through whom Achebe narrates a more nuanced, dialectically complex portrait of the relationship between power and individual conscience in this society, as well as that between the political (and educated) elite and the wider population. For most of the first-person narrative that forms *A Man of the People*, Odili is not blind to the unreliability of his own motives, both in joining Nanga and then in opposing him later on a political stage. He realises even as he is being charmed into accepting Nanga's offer that dubious forces within him are overcoming his usual defences of scepticism and irony. He also watches himself continually make downward adjustments to the extremely high standards of political conduct he starts off espousing, so that he can accommodate Nanga's obvious manipulations more charitably. "Perhaps it was their impatience" that saw through the hypocrisies of proud modesty "that made men like Nanga successful politicians while starry-eyed idealists strive vaingloriously to bring into politics niceties and delicate refinements that belong elsewhere" (1966, 12).

The trivial sexual rivalry, from which originates the central conflict with Nanga that soon assumes national proportions, is in fact an essential dimension to understanding not just the character of Odili, but also the political culture of this particular society. Sexual envy and possessiveness are clearly the initial catalysts that cause him to oppose Nanga and remain so late into the election campaign, if not until the very end: he thinks of the support of Max's Common People's Convention merely as "a second string to [his] bow" (88). But besides exposing a youthful, cavalier masculinity that is obviously of dubious reliability in any social cause or political movement requiring sustained commitment, Achebe also makes important indirect points about the near-farcical shallowness of the political structure of such a society. It is testimony to how *thin* the political culture of the country is that a paltry, machismo-driven, inter-personal sexual rivalry can be amplified into a dispute involving the electoral destiny of an entire constituency. Odili, without any preparation or previous evidence of political dedication,

can enter overnight the race to manipulate the people of his community in an election. There is nobody he has to establish any credentials before, because there is a structurally entrenched and cultivated distance between the population he should be answerable to, and the political class he briefly becomes part of.

Yet, despite making compromise after compromise in what turns increasingly into the narrowest of personal vendettas with all pretence abandoned of any broader principles or plans of reform, Odili ends his narrative with a reflection of great bitterness. He decides that in Nanga and the rest of the government, the people have the leader they deserve, because the leader and the people have come to reflect each other: the people themselves had become “even more cynical than their leaders and were apathetic into the bargain” (161). In this light the new military regime with its promises of stabilising the country, abolishing multi-party democracy, and vigorously prosecuting corruption seems to him a preferable option. Moreover, watching at the end how fickle public opinion and memory seem to be, Odili decides that it is just as well that Max was avenged “not by the people’s collective will but by one solitary woman who loved him. Had his spirit waited for the people to demand redress it would have been waiting still, in the rain and out in the sun” (167). He concludes that personal (and inter-personal) redemption is the only honest alternative left in such a society:

For I do honestly believe that in the fat-dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime just ended--- a regime which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut, [...] in such a regime, I say you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest--- without asking to be paid” (167).²³

²³ Such disenchantment, with the wider population as much as with the new elite and the leadership, is often to be found in the idealists and nation-builders portrayed in much African literature. It recurs prominently as a theme in the work of Ayi Kwei Armah, to name another well-known instance, as well as in Soyinka’s novel *The Interpreters*. Armah’s nameless protagonist in *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*, and Baako in *Fragments* reach similarly despairing conclusions about their once

The Elite and 'the People': Structural Divides and Cognitive Failures.

Through Odili, Obi, Munira and other members of the educated or political nationalist elite, the novels above provide overwhelming textual evidence that illustrates various implications of Partha Chatterjee's thesis about this class (even in its most apparently idealistic, nationally-oriented, and principled individuals) being ultimately isolated, inadequate and superficial, and lacking both the integrated interpretative capacities as well as the sustained will necessary to act towards realising their nation-building dreams. While all the texts make a clear distinction between these members of the 'interpretative' elite and their rapacious class brethren--- the politicians, bureaucrats and local capitalists whom we might collectively call the 'exploitative' elite--- they demonstrate other critical failures of analysis and action that have proved to be barriers in building an (emotional or civil) sense of nationhood throughout a population. We realise that these self-appointed social critics, activists and interpreters often simply do not comprehend the scale and range of their worlds, which is crucial to why their dreams of directing their societies towards new becomings founder.²⁴

Another peculiar strain running through the intellectuals and idealists of these novels--- Ngugi's Mugo and Munira (both of whom turn to religious messianism and believe themselves to be prophets, which only leads to more destructive consequences rather than any successful community-building), Baako in *Fragments*, Chris in *Anthills of the Savannah*, and Soyinka's 'interpreters'---- is the involuntary fear they betray faced

idealised national brethren. But such cynicism and desperation reach a nadir of simplistic, binary prejudice in Armah's *Why are We So Blest?*

²⁴ For a comprehensive critique of such a 'literature of disillusionment', see Neil Lazarus's book-length study of the novels of Armah (1990), especially Chapters 1 and 2 (1-45) in which he argues that such despair fails on multiple levels in its understanding and historical diagnosis, and often reflects only a superficial and inadequate 'messianist', revolutionary idealism that members of the 'conscientious', educated bourgeoisie in many African societies imagine to be active and sustainable socio-political engagement.

with absolutely ordinary people going about ordinary daily business. They are constantly in terror of being attacked criminally or out of simmering social resentments. Yet apart from Chris's murder by a drunken policeman in *Anthills...* (who does not know that Chris is not an even lower 'subaltern' than he is), no such violence ever occurs. Instead, we see Chris' revelatory first-time journey out of the capital, and Baako watching the fishermen engaged in hard labour. After an accident, "the people" in *Fragments* fish out and bury their own dead, with no help from any state apparatus, with no space for the luxury of grief, just "small sounds of regret" (Armah, 1987, 142) at their losses, and their "knowing fear of the immensity of the long hazard ahead" (23).

Their 'own' societies simply bewilder these self-appointed 'builders' in its unfamiliarity. Karega in *Petals of Blood*, lecturing a schoolroom about the land and the history that every African should be proud of, comes to see in the children's expectant eyes that he is merely passing on platitudes, abstract and futile; these children too would have to flee this orphaned "drought-stricken depopulated wasteland" to become cooks and cleaners like their parents in Nairobi. Yet among the educated intellectuals portrayed in these fictions, Karega alone is shown to have broken away from the privileges of his schooling as well as the confines of his class and the city. In accordance with his political beliefs, he actually lives and works among 'the people' about whom he has such vivid transformatory dreams. Karega leads the people of Ilmorog to their MP in the capital, and goes from being a scholarship student and lawyer's assistant to a school-master in Ilmorog, and then a street-vendor, a dockside worker, and an agricultural labourer, "since the only thing that he had now was his two hands, he would somehow sell its creative power to whoever would buy it and then join with all the other hands in ensuring that at least they had a fair share of what their thousand sets of fingers produced" (Ngugi, 1977, 302). Despite every reason for

despair “he would not, could not accept the static vision of Wanja’s logic. It was too ruthless, and it could only lead to [...] self-or mutual annihilation” (303).

But no intellectual steps forward to lead the people of Abazon in *Anthills of the Savannah* when they come to place their futile petition before the President in the capital after years of neglect. And yet Ngugi portrays the irony that recurs right until Mugo denounces himself at the end of *A Grain of Wheat*, in that everybody in the village reveres him as a symbol of integrity almost as meaningful to them as Uhuru (independence) itself. No matter how much Mugo retreats or denies it, these retreats themselves are re-interpreted as inspirational instances of humility and detachment. It is a village full of cripples, survivors, and families who have lost members in the armed struggle for liberation, but there remains a ‘spontaneous’ national enthusiasm that is dimmed only when the likes of Mugo are revealed to have been cowards, and shown to be gradually destroyed later in *Petals of Blood* when independence does nothing to improve their daily lives.²⁵

²⁵ Fanon (and other revolutionary leaders like Amilcar Cabral in Guinea) anticipate this mass disenchantment and post-independence dissipation, in various passages besides the ‘messianic’ strain that Neil Lazarus shows Armah to have primarily inherited. Fanon’s “messianism” is nowhere near as unilateral as Armah translates into his fiction. In the chapters on ‘Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses’ (1985, 85-118), and ‘Pitfalls of National Consciousness’ (119-165) which describes a scenario after independence has been won, he makes clear that all the initial enthusiasm to overthrow oppression that characterises easily incited anti-colonial “peasant revolts” can only be transformed into deep and lasting liberation through slow, daily nation-wide work and political education.

This work is what Fanon sees as the essential “national liberation” without which independence is a symbolic nothing. Indeed, such symbols (and nationalism itself) are fatal distractions, which, as the politicians in Ngugi and Achebe repeatedly demonstrate, are effectively manipulated by leaders and the elite to obscure the non-occurrence of any actual transformation.

Ngugi: 'Subaltern Re-inscription' in *Petals of Blood*.

Criticising Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* in particular, (although the objections could apply to Armah's fictions and even to an extent to Achebe), Ngugi points out how 'the people' hardly make an undifferentiated appearance except as a crowd or an object of discussion throughout his narrative. His criticism is that such a mass portrait amounts to an essentialist, inadequately imagined national envisioning, that provides evidence of the failure of such novels in their engagements with the multiple circumstances and agents who are involved in any collective social evolution. To him, such fictions narrate landscapes where "the ordinary people, workers and peasants [...] remain passive watchers on the shore or pitiful comedians on the road" (1972, 30-31). Ngugi writes of Soyinka's vision (and this would definitely apply to the despair and cynicism arrived at in Armah's narratives by Ocran, 'the man' or Juana, or to Odili's conclusion in *A Man of the People*), that confronted with the apparent impossibility of collective political effort, the author's "good man" becomes the "uncorrupted individual: his liberal humanism leads him to admire an individual's lone act of courage, and thus he often ignores the creative struggle of the masses" (65).

Aijaz Ahmad makes a similar critique of Rushdie's novel *Shame* (that we shall return to in Section Three). Ahmad argues that the novel by focussing solely on "the experience of a decadent class" the "ruling elite", and presenting the history of its "corruption and criminalities" (1994, 138) "as the experience of a *country*" (140), excludes:

The dailiness of lives lived under oppression, and the human bonding--- of resistance, of decency, of innumerable heroisms, of both ordinary and extraordinary kinds--- which makes it possible for large numbers of people to look each other in the eye, without guilt, with affection and solidarity and humour, and makes life, even under oppression, endurable and frequently joyous (139).

In an introductory essay to the Subaltern Studies project, Ranajit Guha famously argues that the "unhistorical historiography" of colonial India excludes the "politics

of the people” (Guha and Spivak, 1988, 40) in their homogenising focus on the activities and ideologies of the nationalist elite, as if this was the only trajectory comprising the nationalist movement:

For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were the [...] subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country--- that is, the people. This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. It was traditional only in so far as its roots could be traced back to pre-colonial times, but it was by no means archaic in the sense of being outmoded (40).

In a diagnosis analogous to Chatterjee’s (but premised upon the divergent historical experiences of various classes, rather than upon the material/spiritual divide within elite-nationalist cognition), Guha traces as a consequence of this dichotomy “the historic failure of the nation to come into its own”, which makes “the study of this failure [...] the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India” (43). In this vein, we might interpret Ngugi’s work as an instance of ‘subaltern re-inscription’ that explicitly redirects its focus from the ruling (and intellectual) urban classes alone.²⁶ The span of his narrative canvases is recognisably broader than Achebe’s or Armah’s, and his casts of characters are culled from a much wider cross-section of society. Both *Petals of Blood* and *A Grain of Wheat* are set primarily among peasantry and herdsmen in small villages, thus de-privileging the city as the site of national formation.²⁷ Further, Mugo, Abdullah, Wanja, Nyakinyua, Mumbi, and many other major characters in Ngugi’s work do not belong to the tiny, urban ‘interpreting’ class that Soyinka’s, Achebe’s and Armah’s narratives are located almost entirely within. Therefore, keeping in mind Odili’s disenchantment with the wider population itself as being corrupt beyond any possibility of resuscitation, we will now consider the themes that arise through the far more differentiated portrayals of “the-people-who-comprise-the-nation” (Gandhi,

²⁶ In different thematic contexts in Sections 3 and 4, we return to more examples of such narrative projects (Rohinton Mistry, Bessie Head, J M Coetzee), and their nation-representing implications.

1998, 119) in Ngugi's work. Who is it that the nation-builders in Achebe and Armah give up on when they contemplate their disenchantment with 'the masses'? How dynamically have they been imagined and fictionalised? What transformative possibilities have characters from outside the urban elite been shown to possess: what is their view of the national project?

Ilmorog in *Petals of Blood* is a village almost entirely deserted by its young. The old who are left behind cannot understand the outlandish lure of Nairobi, that can carry away sons and daughters to become cooks, house servants, and cleaners: "our young men and women have left us. The glittering metal has called them" (7). They are gratefully astonished when young outsiders like Munira and Abdullah decide to stay and look after the school and the village shop. Their only other relationship with the processes and institutions of Kenya's post-independence modernity is through an MP they never see except before elections, and 'taxes' (and other illegal payments) that they are forced into paying annually without ever receiving any benefits or explanations. They are promised roads and water pipes that never arrive, and in a time of prolonged drought it never occurs to them, before Karega points it out, that they need not feel completely abandoned in matters of survival or dying; they have a right to petition their MP and expect help from the State.

Yet after their long trek to Nairobi, when aid and 'development' do come to Ilmorog, it is imposed upon them without the slightest sensitivity to local requirements or any appearance of inclusiveness. Where Fanon envisions nation-building as a process where even a bridge should not be built before the local population has internalised every principle behind its necessity (1985, 162), Ngugi portrays how banks seize land from locals until they are forced again to work for wages on their own land, just as

²⁷ Something Fanon also argues as being vital in the course of post-colonial liberation (1985, 150).

during the colonial period. Outside entrepreneurs, from the same cliques that run the rest of the country, have taken over all the new *and* old shops, and even a traditional drink is now manufactured on an industrial scale with no dues whatsoever paid to its original producers:

Within only ten years [...] Ilmorog peasants had been displaced from the land; some had joined the army of workers, others were semi-workers with one foot in a plot of land and one foot in a factory, while others became petty traders in hovels and shanties they did not even own, along the Trans-Africa Road, or criminals and prostitutes [...]. The herdsmen had suffered a similar fate: some had died; others had been driven even further out into drier parts away from the new enclosed game-parks for tourists, and yet others had become hired labourers. [...] And behind it all, as a monument to the changes, was the Trans-Africa Road and the two storied building of the African Economic bank Ltd (1977, 302).

Nyakinyua dies after the bank seizes her land; Abdullah is reduced from being the owner of the local bar to selling oranges on the roadside. Mumbi prospers, but only after she decides to become first a prostitute and then the expensive Madam of her own brothel, where among her most lucrative clients is the man who once used and abandoned her.

It is against such a backdrop of exploitation and abandonment that we should review the disenchantment of the central characters in Achebe and Armah, and perhaps it will now be clearer why Achebe's Umuofians are so eager to make the most of the opportunities of being in the capital and having their kinsmen in important posts. If, as Ernest Renan has put it, "a nation is a large-scale solidarity constituted by the feeling of sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make again in the future, [that] pre-supposes a past; [but that] is summarised, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a national life" (Bhabha, 1995, 19), Ngugi portrays starkly the paradox of immense sacrifices made, but no solidarity constituted and no tangible national deeds achieved,

except those of violation and exploitation. Renan goes on to state that the existence of a nation is “a daily plebiscite: just as an individual’s existence is a perpetual affirmation of life” (19). Yet the people of Ilmorog are shown to have absolutely no stake in any ‘plebiscite’ involving the new society, material or political, except when its builders and leaders periodically descend to exploit them, with a degree of force against which even their collective resistance has no meaning. And again, by way of corollary we see why Achebe’s Umuofians remain loyally bound to the UPU (rather than to any idea of Nigeria)--- at least they have a clear and ongoing emotional and material stake in a ‘plebiscite’ conceived on such a premise.

Yet it is in Ngugi’s novels, where the portraits of neglect and violation of ordinary people by the nation’s elite are developed most fully, that we see evidence of more creative and resistive individual and collective efforts materialise, rather than the complete despair that Achebe’s and Armah’s protagonists arrive at. For instance, *Petals of Blood* assembles the only multi-ethnic cast among these novels and narrates a range of their encounters, as well as the encounters it portrays between the various classes and locations that comprise the Kenyan nation, to explore both the resulting exploitation and traumas but also the possibilities of solidarity that emerge. Besides, Ngugi also inserts several pedagogic voices in the novel, which preach exhortative lessons ranging from Marxist diagnoses to songs and fables recalling the ancient glory as well as the ongoing struggle of all black people in Africa. But while this may be seen on one level as a mobilising ‘strategic essentialism’ of the kind that Benita Parry²⁸ and Spivak have argued to be vital at a certain stage of any struggle for liberation, it also problematically descends occasionally into ‘nativist’ xenophobia, if not along the lines of ethnicity, then along the lines of race. There is a lot of prejudice against Asians expressed by different characters (and pedagogic voices) throughout Ngugi’s fiction, even though his response would probably be that it is more a class antagonism that is being expressed

in these terms, because Asians controlled many small and large businesses in Kenya and formed part of the country's exploitative merchant class. Still, it highlights the point that perhaps every gathering under a nationalist banner, however necessary and even progressive, must at some stage inevitably work through strategies of homogenising, excluding, and 'othering' sections of its own population as much as outsiders.²⁹

But related to exploring the political and material conditions of vast sections of their society's population amid the uneven dynamism of post-independence transitions, these novelists have always gone further and examined the resulting cultural, moral, and inter-personal implications of such profound structural changes and historical upheaval, and it is these explorations we now consider.

Post-Independence Social and Cultural Upheavals in Achebe, Armah and Ngugi.

Ben Okri, speaking generally of traditional rural life in Nigeria, claims that there remain large tracts of consciousness almost entirely unaffected (and undamaged) by the colonial encounter, which thus preserve intact, indigenous ways within communities of conceiving the world around them and productively inhabiting it. Okri's further point is that these heritages should now be mined and synthesised to fashion both an indigenous spiritual and national modernity for Nigeria (Wilkinson, 1992, 86-7). Yet the novelistic evidence from the works we have been discussing hardly bears out such optimistic portraits of an unassailable and 'timeless' moral and cultural state of good health. While both Achebe and Ngugi trace the absence of a widely disseminated

²⁸ See her essay on 'Resistance Theory...' in Mongia (1996, 84-109)

nation-building sense ultimately to entrenched class divisions and divergences of interests, as well as acute failures of leadership even in its most idealistic and well-meaning forms, their works discover consequent problems within levels of daily social existence that are as pervasive as they are ultimately 'anti-national'--- that is, non-conducive to any collectively undertaken nation-building project. For instance, in the proverbs and fables that lace almost everybody's speech in especially the novels of Achebe and Armah, characters frequently find the forms in which to draw on the heritage of their community as an interpretative guide for their own lives in the new worlds they find themselves inhabiting. But besides the danger of treating what are sometimes merely clichés as easily available pills of wisdom that guarantee moral sanction from immutably relevant cultural authorities, what is ironically questioned throughout these novels is how such sayings often seem to be conveniently drawn from a very narrow cross-section of life-experience, and more importantly, the manner of their application to contemporary situations. The narratives thus investigate whether such memories of cultural inheritance actually indicate currents of undamaged, uninterrupted continuity, or whether these proverbs represent the debris that survive as hints of a profound perplexity? How do these characters apply their heritage to their contemporary condition, when the world around them is no longer the familiar, bounded setting from which such wisdom was once derived?

In the fictional landscapes of Achebe, Armah and Ngugi we hardly ever witness that idyllic, composed, unbroken understanding of myth and tradition that Ben Okri (and Chatterjee's nineteenth-century Indian nationalists) so often extol. Also, if Chatterjee is right, and the cultural (and 'spiritual') project was at least as significant to the nationalists as undertaking the struggle for eventual political liberation, then once again the novelistic evidence in these African societies illustrates both a failure to disseminate

²⁹ The dangers of which Said warns against repeatedly in *Culture and Imperialism*, as does Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. For fuller discussions see Said (1993, 252-265) and Fanon, especially

any constructive sense of national identity within this domain as much as on the ideological and material fronts, as well as further damaging implications of the unsustainably dichotomous cognitive separation between the spiritually 'timeless' and the materialist-historical domains of nationalist identity. Far from facilitating an organic cultural modernity, the texts reveal the extent of confusion, and indeed moral and cultural damage, done by the violence of the colonial encounter (and the uneven transitions of the post-independence aftermath) to the traditionally held value-systems of different communities within the population, and how such upheavals actually prove a major hindrance in fashioning modern national myths and institutions. Basil Davidson, for one, would disagree almost entirely with Okri's vision. His historical portrait is much closer to the worlds the novels provide evidence of:

Generally the pre-colonial and pre-nationalist African community offered the individual a moral and psychological identity within his world, and a guide to reality that was rounded and complete, encompassing past, present and future. In a decisive cultural sense, this was the basis on which Africans met the colonial experience. The community of the founding charter within which they stood was firm and trusted ground. Now it shifted beneath their feet, and slid towards what seemed increasingly like chaos. The world they knew 'turned upside down', throwing a tried security into a void of sickening doubt. [...]

Modernisation duly came. But it came in no fortunate way. Its overall impact of the first half-century or so was to undermine this African community in its myriad forms, attack and often destroy its modes of social control, dislocate its moral systems (1978, 51-52).

Any hope of a sense of Nigerianness disseminating among the Igbos of Achebe's novels is wrecked upon an apparently bedrock belief in "ours is ours, but mine is mine", that has not only remained untransformed by any new sense of multi-ethnic national collectivity, but actually appears to have been consolidated within this new atmosphere. But besides the sayings and fables that always seem to surface when required to vindicate any dishonesty, nepotism, or apathy, there are those that are revealed to be fatally misdirected in the context of any shared nation-building if such might ever be undertaken.³⁰ In *A Man of the People* Achebe explores the morality

(1985, 114-118).

within a small community that justifies thieving as long as the owner does not notice. Odili argues that even if the saying might be pertinent to village life, in that “the owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner; the laws of the village become powerless” (1966, 167). Elsewhere contemporary life has inspired its own cynical aphorisms phrased in contemporary terms: “you chop, me self I chop, palaver finish” (167).

The novels expose other attitudes that serve as evidence of how the resilient abilities within individuals and groups to assess their situation in an altered, even fractured environment and then to be able to re-orient themselves, have suffered noticeable injury in Ghana, Ilmorog and in the Igbo world. Throughout Ngugi’s narratives, we continually come across ‘casualties’ of the violent suddenness and the imbalances of cultural encounter during the colonial period. For instance, there are many characters in disproportionate awe of one or another aspect of Western power--- either the gun, the cross, or rank and wealth--- to the point where these have become their only criteria for evaluating human worth. Yet they are by no means depicted as simple collaborators: the confusion runs far deeper than that. Once, in a casual analysis of a popular song, Obi in *No Longer at Ease* realises how it can be interpreted as reiterated bafflement at the many ways in which worlds have been turned upside down. Achebe portrays Obi’s father’s obsessive reverence for every manifestation of the English printed word that he hoards in his room indiscriminately. Yet he is ultimately not courageous enough to be progressive within the frameworks of either a traditional or a Christian identity. Despite

³⁰ Achebe provides numerous examples: “the village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No man in Urua will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very backyard are we not saved the journey” (1966, 141)? Or again, as one man says at a political meeting of their leaders: “we know they are eating [...] but we are eating too. They are bringing us water and they promise to bring us electricity. We did not have those things before; that is why I say we are eating too” (1966, 139). Odili describes how this is “a regime which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut” (167), and where any idea of protest or transformation can always be quelled by another proverb: “our people have a saying that if you respect today’s king others will respect you when your turn comes” (70).

being aggressively (and defiantly) Christian in every other aspect, Obi's father cannot allow his son to marry an *osu*, a category he should have rejected long ago because of his adopted religion. Instead he evokes the ancient taboos of their past as well as the near-certain prospect of Obi's ostracisation in the future, as if it is already a given immutable. But the greater irony lies in the fact that Obi himself, and his modern promiscuous friends in the city, have little more revolutionary stamina than the older generation. His friends counsel him to wait for a future where everybody is "civilized": such foolhardy exertions are not for pioneers.

In *Fragments*, Baako's grandmother Naana, initially so assertive in her traditionalism, also confesses by the end that her sense of the world has been shattered into "a thousand and thirty useless pieces" (Armah, 1987, 196). Armah's protagonist Baako theorises elaborately how a traditional conception of the dead interceding with the ancestors to win favours for the living has been comprehensively reformulated into terms that suit contemporary pragmatic practice. He calls it the "cargo cult", and finds parallels within this new 'morality' that justify to his family why there is nothing wrong in their expecting him to return from Europe with cars and refrigerators. In this kind of valorisation, whereby aspects of an older value-system are re-oriented to legitimise and even glorify the status quo, Baako detects "a pure rock-bottom kind of realism, the kind that accepts what happens at this moment in this place and raises it to the level of principle. A reality principle par excellence" (156). He notices how various levels of people in Ghana get hostile at any talk of a "changed approach" (156), and explains this near non-existence of any sense of transformatory possibility by arguing that it is not "makers" the new "cargo cult" wants, only intermediaries. "Making takes too long, the intermediary brings quick gains", and besides, "to think of being a maker oneself could be sheer unforgivable sin" (157).

Thus, rather than any sweeping, *a priori* dismissals of ethnicity-based nationalism as always being ‘nativist’, xenophobic and regressive,³¹ these various fictional explorations reveal an entire spectrum of meanings and dimensions to the post-independence roles of such nationalism within a modern nation-state paradigm. We have examined both its function as an alternative (and often damagingly rival) gathering point of collective solidarity, as well as its continuing importance as a source of vital material and emotional sustenance, frequently because of the failure of the new state to provide its citizens with such opportunities. But these novels have also examined the use (and abuse) of such identities in mobilising political activity within a modern framework. And finally, we see how they have questioned the enduring relevance of pre-modern cultural heritages within a transformed social environment in ways that reveal both positive and negative dimensions. These novels posit that it is certainly not in the new, tiny power-holding bourgeoisie’s interest to foster within the people a wider sense of non-ethnic unity, through disseminating consciousness or forging the bonds of new mythologies, or entering into the slow, organised work of actual material development (because the people would then realise they have a rightful stake in the building and the benefits of the new nation). In fact as Neil Lazarus points out, Baako comes to discover in *Fragments*, (as do Soyinka’s protagonists in *The Interpreters*) that the “gap” between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ in their societies is not an ‘empty’ space; it is “patrolled by an army of institutions and apparatuses functioning to insure that no modern-day would-be Prometheus [...] is able to smuggle sparks [...] to the ‘have-nots’ ” (1990, 189), even if they are institutions set up ostensibly to promote precisely such dissemination, such as the universities, the civil services, and Ghanavision. Also, the fact that a ‘spontaneous’, ‘untutored’ mass national consciousness simply does not exist (or cannot be sustained without continued further post-independence work), is evident not only through the writings of Neil Lazarus and

³¹ As is common among ‘cosmopolitan’, Marxist and/or modernist theorists and thinkers, both European and non-Western: Gellner, Hobsbawm, and to an extent even Said and Bhabha, just to name a few examples.

Fanon, but also when we examine the emotional and symbolic orientations that grip the imaginations and sanction the actions of ordinary Igbos in Achebe's Nigeria, Armah's Ghanaians and Ngugi's Kenyans. The extraordinary, Kafkaesque distances between the rulers and the ruled as revealed in these novels, lead quite logically to ordinary people taking on both individual and collective identities in the only palpable forms they recognise as 'natural' to their positions. In Achebe, there are always the ancient and secure affiliations to community and village, and as far as any conception of individuality is entertained, the "ours is ours, but mine is mine" dictum that people see in practice everywhere around them is guidance enough: besides, they are only emulating the examples set up above them by their leaders. But as Ngugi complains of Soyinka and Armah and attempts to rectify through the re-inscriptions in his own fiction, there is often nothing deeper presented as a conception of resistance and creative agency for ordinary people either as individuals or as groups, beyond the options of passivity or active acquisition and survivalist dishonesty. When there is any individual rage, it is taken out impotently on rabid dogs or trucks or TV sets (as in *Fragments*). During angry rioting, Odili confesses to feeling a complete lack of moral culpability, because there is not seen to be a national fabric to damage:

We were exhilarated like everyone else by the heady atmosphere of impending violence. [...] After seven years of lethargy any action seemed welcome and desirable; the country was ripe and impatient to shed in violent exercise the lazy folds of flabby skin and fat it had put on in the greedy years of indolence. The scandals that were daily exposed in the newspapers--- far from causing general depression in the country--- produced a feeling akin to festivity [...] for the rest of us who thought we had nothing to lose" (Achebe, 1966, 112-113).

Questioning the State?

Chatterjee's diagnosis, in the case of India, is that the dimension of culture is just another area where an inadequately imagined coupling of the coexistent, divergent, yet

equally dynamic realities of community and State (as well as culture and nationalist history) is at the root of much "post-colonial misery" (1993, 11):

Nationalist texts were addressed both to 'the people' who were said to constitute the nation and to the colonial masters whose claim to rule nationalism questioned. [...] Nationalism denied the alleged inferiority of the colonised people: it also asserted that a backward nation could 'modernise' itself while retaining its cultural identity. It thus produced a discourse [...] which, even as it challenged the colonial claim to political domination [...] also accepted the very intellectual premises of 'modernity' on which colonial domination was based. How are we to sort out these contradictory elements in nationalist discourse" (1986, 30)?

Chatterjee has written repeatedly on this subject, not only in questioning the premises of nationalist cultural identity, but also examining the framework of the modernising nation-state as being an inadequately imagined, insensitively imposed "derivative discourse". He has interrogated the implications--- questionable at best, destructive at worst--- of perpetuating the contradictions underpinning such a paradigm:

The trouble was that the moral-intellectual leadership of the nationalist elite operated in a field constituted by a very different set of distinctions--- those between the spiritual and the material, the inner and the outer, the essential and the inessential. That contested field over which nationalism had proclaimed its sovereignty and where it had imagined its true community was neither coextensive with nor coincidental to the field constituted by the public private distinction. In the former field, the hegemonic project of nationalism could hardly make the distinctions of language, religion, caste or class a matter of indifference to itself. The project was that of cultural 'normalisation', like [...] bourgeois hegemonic projects everywhere, but with the all-important difference that it had to choose its site of autonomy from a position of subordination to a colonial regime that had on its side the most universal justificatory resources produced by post-Enlightenment social thought.

The result is that autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the post-colonial state. Here lies the root of our post-colonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state. If the nation is an imagined community and if nations must also take the form of states, then our theoretical language must allow us to talk about community and state at the same time. I do not think our present theoretical language allows us to do this (1993, 11).

In arguing thus, he forms part of a long, ongoing and heterogeneous tradition of sceptical debate among African and Indian thinkers, that has included figures as

different as Gandhi, Tagore,³² Said, and Fanon. There are several aspects to their scepticism: some have seen it as a tragically paradoxical continuation of a governing model that was put in place within colonies for the clear and related purposes of economic exploitation and civil repression, because even if the nation-state system promised and partially delivered liberty, equality, fraternity and opportunity in its European incarnations, the colonial state never even set out in principle any such aims for those under its domination.³³ What would be inherited instead with such a hierarchic structure of governance would be the side effects (or strategies) of imperialist (and contemporary bourgeois-capitalist) policy: sowing artificial and arbitrary social categories and national boundaries, promoting divisive ethnocentric binaries both within the state and against other peoples outside it, ruling through the threat and use of authorised state violence, and perpetuating hierarchies within society, both horizontally between the capital city and the majority of the population in the countryside, and vertically between a tiny ruling class of politicians, bourgeoisie and bureaucrats, and the rest of the people. Others have argued that a structure that emerged out of the requirements of a certain historical epoch in bourgeois, capitalist Europe might not apply to India or societies in Africa, because both a bourgeoisie and a capitalistic modernism might be irrelevant and/or harmful in these conditions. For many in this tradition of anti-statist thinkers, the inheritance of and persistence with such structures is what has fundamentally undermined, to the point of destroying, any possibility of actual progress and evolution. Applying such ideas hypothetically to the fictionalised African societies we are studying, it is not only the neglect and/or active abuse of the wealth, machinery, and opportunities of the post-independence State by the tiny ruling

³² Gandhi famously advocated the disbanding of the Congress Party as well as all inherited modernist state infrastructure after the achievement of independence, so that India might be transformed into a vast collection of small-scale, economically self-sufficient villages. Tagore, in a lecture series given during the 1920s considered the nation-state to be a conformity-enforcing and divisive “prison-house of consciousness”.

³³ For a fuller discussion of the implications of African nationalists overlooking such contradictions, see Kwame A. Appiah’s book *In My Father’s House* (1992, 264-267).

class (whom Davidson has called the “inheritance elites”) that is responsible for these various crises, but its existence itself that logically continues to foster such abuse.

Yet we also know that for Nehru, Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Nyerere, Mandela, Senghor, and numerous other leaders, thinkers and prominent nation-builders, both Western and non-Western, it was only as a nation-state that each of them could envision inhabiting and navigating their post-independence history. Even if there were other significant ideological differences--- some of them opted for a model of centrally planned state-directed economic development whereas others were much more welcoming of foreign investment and the idea of developing conditions for local capitalism--- structuring a new society around and through the State was the one paradigm most post-colonial leaderships adopted in common.

Conclusion: Reading Novels as Thoroughly ‘Worlded’.

So far in the two chapters of this second section, we have attempted to demonstrate the substance of the thesis laid out theoretically in its introduction--- that fiction can simultaneously narrate (and thereby inter-relate) a range of social, political, cultural and material dimensions through its unique means of exploring beings-in-their-worlds. We have begun to indicate how its ontological capacity for ‘narrative calculus’ can add up to a comprehensive and dynamic examination of various levels of a nation’s life; and further, because of its Bakhtinian properties, how different stories--- within the same novel or arising out of the disagreements of one novelist’s preoccupations with another (such as Ngugi’s with Armah and Soyinka)--- can provide contradictory yet valuably supplementary voices and perspectives, which cumulatively evoke the multi-dimensional spectrum of becoming that constitutes national history. The next chapter, the last one in this section, will continue with this underlying objective, of establishing the thorough ‘worldedness’ and the existential relevance thereby of the novel. But for now we will

focus on differing *formal* investigations of the questions we have raised immediately above (on the vital issue of constructing nations around and through the building of states), considering not just the themes that arise in the novels we will analyse, but also the modes of novelising themselves. First we will examine more thoroughly the mechanics, processes, and agents of state-building in a narrative of Nadine Gordimer's (*A Guest of Honour*), that performs simultaneously conflicts between various structural and economic theories and the political personalities behind them as part of its analysis of a fictional state's history. Then we give our investigation a further turn through our readings of two novels by Salman Rushdie, where he examines in forms very different from Gordimer's, both the individual existential impact of inhabiting the Indian nation-state, as well as the presence of many heterogeneous histories, trajectories, and connections within that framework. Yet the overarching theoretical presence in the chapter will be that of Georg Lukacs, and his admiring elaboration of a 'critical realist' fictional standard against which he dismisses less 'objective' and historicised modes of social envisioning. It is such a dismissal that the chapter centrally takes issue with, arguing instead (through juxtaposing the very different themes and means of Gordimer and Rushdie, both of whom attempt comprehensive analyses of a nation's history), that diverse formal methods and thematic priorities challenge and supplement each other in enriching, if conflicting ways, rather than some fictions being more 'objective' or 'historicised' than others. And it is precisely because the novel extends an ontological invitation to be inscribed by particular voices and stories, and also to be formally metamorphosed in each instance, that such discourse works cumulatively as a thorough engagement with the fullness of a society's existence, because it expands the range of voice, perspective and trajectory it is able to encompass with each new (mode of) re-inscribing.

Chapter 5: Alternative Narratives for Alternative Envisionings.

Gordimer, Lukacs, and Narrating 'Totalities'.

Writing about post-independence African novels in 1973, Nadine Gordimer expresses a general reservation that "in African writers' interpretations, where African societies fail, the blame lies with the individual, the political ideology is hardly questioned" (1973, 44). She argues against the literature of Armah, Peter Abrahams, Achebe, and Soyinka that they never "suggest a reordering of society in political terms as a possible solution", and points out how no creative writer in English has yet dealt with, for instance, "the ideology of African socialism" (44):

In these novels, as in those of others in which politics is fate--- 'environment, fetter and goal'--- there is little to indicate that that fate seeks to determine itself in terms of profound social change. [...] At most there is a concurrence of opinion that the Western brand of democracy may not do, and that tribalism must be abolished if it cannot be pressed into the service of unity in any other way. [...] For this reason, the post-colonial political novel [...] seems scarcely to have scratched the surface of the African situation. The theme of *Let My People Go* has not come near its ultimate expression yet; African writers have still to deal with characters faced with the necessity of an historical choice by political means (44-45).

Gordimer's own most comprehensive novelistic attempts at portraying such processes (in *A Guest of Honour* and *None to Accompany Me*, for instance) are clearly constructed within the tradition of what Lukacs has famously called "critical realism", and about which she has written so often and admiringly. To Gordimer such novels constitute a line of "work in which the social changes that characterise our era are most truly reflected, character is not sacrificed to artistic pattern and the human condition is understood dynamically, in an historical perspective" (32). For Lukacs, if "man is *zoion politikon*, a social animal" (1964, 19), then "society is the principal subject of the novel, that is, man's social life in its ceaseless interaction with surrounding nature, which forms the basis of social activity, and with the different social institutions and

customs which mediate the relations between individuals in social life” (Lukacs, 1989, 139).

The novel has the task of evoking directly the full span of life, the complexity and intricacy of its developments, the incommensurability of its detail. [...] This whole includes not simply the dead objects through which men’s social life manifests itself, but also the various customs, institutions, habits, usages, etc., characteristic of a certain phase of human society and of the direction it is taking (1989, 139).

So far we recognise echoes of both Bakhtin and Tolstoy: if we recall the former in the way that Lukacs also finds the novel thoroughly ‘worlded’ from within and containing diverse characters, worlds and existential dimensions inextricably performed in narrative together, we remember Tolstoy’s statement on the inevitable limits of this capacity for novelising the fullness of a phase of history through ‘narrative calculus’. Lukacs acknowledges that the task he has conceived for fiction is actually “Sisyphus-like”, because “the span of [even] the hugest novel is limited [...] [and] would only give an infinitesimal fraction, even in breadth, of the incommensurable reality of its time” (1989, 138-139). But he then moves in a different positivist direction from either of the two other thinkers in his affirmation nevertheless of the novel’s cognitive and synthetic capacity for performing “totalities”. And this is where he formulates and valorises the particular ‘critical realist’ ‘tradition’ that Gordimer admires, because these novels to Lukacs overcome the problems of selection and containment by giving “central place throughout to all that is typical in characters, circumstances, scenes, etc.” (139). But to achieve this “requires a real grasp of the essential and most important normative connections of life, in the destiny of individuals and society [...] [so that] these essential features and all-important laws of life [...] appear in a new immediacy as the unique personal features of and connections of concrete human beings and concrete situations” (1989, 92).

It is this argued capacity for performing what Lukacs calls the “totality of life” (1989, 221) that Gordimer puts to the service of comprehensive nation-state-building interrogation in a novel such as *A Guest of Honour*. Further, as we shall see, such fictional experiments are also extraordinary demonstrations of the variety of discourses and themes that the form can accommodate, co-perform and thereby novelise.

Some Theoretical Debates about Post-Colonial Statehood, Development and Nationalism.

The Nigerian general and former leader during one of its phases of military government, Yakubu Gowon, has accurately characterised a common African post-colonial predicament: “a newly independent African state struggles against great odds of history, geography, ethnography, and evil effects of imperialism to build a nation in less than a fiftieth of the time it took European states to build theirs” (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994, 235). In considering the difficulties that Gowon thus outlines, it is perhaps possible to formulate a more generous assessment of African nation-states and the efforts of their builders than the novels we have so far examined. For instance, while Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* is acutely critical not only of the corruption of independent Kenya’s political and merchant class, but also of their role in allowing what he sees as the unambiguously harmful influence of Western capital to dictate the development of the new state, Tom Nairn takes his analysis of the conjuncture between capitalist influence and national(ist) development efforts in an alternative and more accommodating direction. He puts forth a less hostile and suspicious proposition in suggesting that nationalism’s “real origins [...] are located not in the folk, nor in the individual’s repressed passion for some sort of wholeness or identity, but in the machinery of world political economy” (1977, 335), and the uneven development it leads to: “the shambling, fighting, lop-sided, illogical head-over-heels fact, so to speak, as distinct from the noble uplift and phased amelioration of the ideal” (337). Such

processes have “inevitably generated an imperialism of the centre over the periphery” (340), and for Nairn, nationalism is a pragmatically mobilised yet emotionally charged field of ideological forces that are inevitably generated by and inextricable from the struggles undergone during this unavoidable “ordeal of development”, as well as a potentially positive source of strength and energy that can be drawn upon to help endure difficult, unfamiliar, and rapid collective becomings.³⁴

The impact of those leading countries was normally experienced as domination and invasion. [...] There was never either time or the sociological space for even development. The new forces of production, [...] were too dynamic and uncontrolled, and the resulting social upheavals were far too rapid and devastating [...]. There was to be no ‘due time’ in modern history. [...] Huge expectations raced ahead of material progress itself. The peripheric elites had no option but to try and satisfy such demands by taking things into their own hands (338-339). [...] Mobilisation had to be in terms of what was there; and the whole point of the dilemma was that there was nothing there--- none of the economic and political institutions of modernity now so needed.

All that there *was* was the people and peculiarities of the region: its inherited *ethnos*, speech, folklore, skin colour, and so on. Nationalism works through differentiae like those because it has to. It is not necessarily democratic in outlook, but it is invariably populist. People are what it has to go on: in the archetypal situation of the really poor or ‘under-developed’ territory, it may be more or less all that nationalists have going for them (340).

Such a perspective may be compared to the functionalist viewpoints of theorists such as Gellner, for whom ethno-nationalist mobilisation only occurs as a reaction when a certain identifiable ethnic group is denied full economic and civic participation, and opposed to the image Eric Hobsbawm proposes of non-European, late-century nationalisms, as “being essentially negative, or rather divisive [...] rejections of modern modes of political organisation, both national and supranational”, and “reactions of weakness and fear, attempts to erect barricades to keep at bay the forces of the modern world” (1993, 170). Continuing in their functionalist vein, both Gellner and Hobsbawm have argued that nation-states have been superseded in the modern world

³⁴ See Nairn (1977, 334-341) for a fuller discussion. See also Matossian on ‘Ideologies of Delayed Development’ in Hutchinson and Smith (1994, 218-225).

by more global modes of economic exchange and organisation, which call for corresponding updates of both socio-political infrastructure as well as nationalist ideology around the world. This is part of the reason why post-colonial nationalisms are to them regressive and reactionary.

Of course, one obvious flaw in such a characterisation of a 'shared' global contemporary is its exclusively Western provenance, that ignores the realities of overwhelmingly uneven development and the implications of being at the receiving end, which Nairn recognises, rather than the controllers of such planetary forces. What if the legal and social structures of the nation-state are the only defences newer countries, that are not in the same phase of development as the apparently 'post-national' West, have against the volatile, overpoweringly transformative effects of global capital? Opposed to such dismissive castings of nationalism as always being reactionary, negative, and atavistic, what Nairn (and numerous others--- Sunil Khilnani, Mary Matossian etc.) bring out instead are the complex, at least potentially positive, and most of all essentially modern aspects of most forms of political identity and activity that are based on nationalist underpinnings. Basil Davidson questions the factors that might lie behind such frequent state disintegration in post-colonial Africa: "did these breakdowns derive from some inferiority of human nature? Were they caused by 'lack of honest politicians', or because there was 'no ideology'? Such explanations were often made, but missed the point" (1978, 292). He continues:

A familiar contemporary impression that Africans had suddenly acquired the means of harmonious progress, guaranteed by parliamentary systems and 'established Western values', and had then as suddenly thrown them away or mislaid them by incompetence or graft, leaving only a sterile chaos, was wide of the truth. There is plenty of chaos and sterility of thought accompanied by clamorous uproars, incredible disasters, sad defeats. Frustration can often make it seem that even the smallest improvement in the quality of life has gone out of reach [...]. Yet through all this crookery and in spite of it, burrowing often out of sight, persisting even in a desert of discouragement, the search for new and

valid forms of community such as can relay but enlarge and modernise the communities of the past, somehow continues on its way (296).

With these claims and counter-positions in mind, we now turn to Gordimer for a heteroglossic state-building experiment--- a Lukacsian demonstration of how contradictory ideologies and politics, the leaders enunciating and enacting them, and the lives and societies upon which their multiple implications are unleashed, can be performed together in the novelising of a country's history.

Development, Leadership, and State-Building in *A Guest of Honour*.

Gordimer includes, both in terms of frequent debate between characters as well as through the actual dramatic unfolding of events in *A Guest of Honour*, various specific social, structural and material issues relevant to the building of a new state--- the economic development choices facing a newly independent African country between nationalisation on the one hand and utilising Western capital and the imminent dangers of neo-colonialist domination on the other; particular, local solutions to the questions of administration as well as improving and extending educational infrastructure at all levels; the effects of Western corporate control on mining and fisheries; what the role of the Independence Party should be in disseminating consciousness and maintaining contact among the rural masses through regular grassroots work after independence; the part trade unions might play in an economy gradually industrialising.³⁵ What transforms subjects such as these into novelistic material in Gordimer's work are the ways in which they are seamlessly woven into the life-stories of her individual protagonists, and portrayed as integral to narrating them. Where Armah's Modin and Solo (in *Why are we so Blest*) are wanderers seeking to restore to some nebulous

³⁵ For just a couple of instances of the extent of detail in the debates within the novel on other specific state-building issues, see Gordimer (1973, 29) and (214).

'Africa' all her glory and rightful deserts in ways totally unspecified, Gordimer performs in detail the sheer magnitude and various levels of a new state's tasks and establishes how gradual and often interrupted they are, how painstakingly particular each 'nation-builder' must be even to get one adult education centre working in one provincial capital. She also captures how the alternative national beginning promised by the aftermath of independence is slowly tarnished, by including within her narrative the first violent beatings up of the mildest voices of Opposition, the first Preventive Detention bill, the first instances of the Party bullying its own population in politically engineered rioting and unions silencing their own members on behalf of the government and the company management, the first foreign companies allowed to set up private armies, all of which orders are issued and justified in the name of unity, development, and national harmony.

But Gordimer, and we, imply much more in arguing that she thoroughly 'novelises' her nation-interrogating material. For instance, we witness frequent and protracted arguments between the positions of Mweta and Shinza on the social and economic choices facing the new state, where the latter is entirely against signing up to any form of dependent partnerships with Western capital: yet, unlike Ngugi's novels, the evil of the opposite position is not always and unambiguously taken for granted. In different public and private settings Shinza elaborates his Fanonian stance at length, on the place of the government in the life of the new society.³⁶ We also hear him articulate his opposition to the ways in which unregulated foreign investment and the unaltered perpetuation of a purely capitalist structure overseen by a tiny bourgeoisie is retarding the state's development. But Gordimer also develops extensively the President's defence of his developmental policy choices, as well as a list of his government's

³⁶ See Gordimer (1973, 270-275) and (360-362) for elaborate articulations of Shinza's position in his own voice. For an equally detailed voicing of Mweta's opposed stance, see Gordimer (324-329).

(Gellneresque) fulfilment of its infrastructural obligations towards its citizens (1973, 327). Through Mweta, Gordimer examines the choices facing a post-colonial leadership attempting to navigate their new nation through the transitions and upheavals of rapid development (such as Nairn and Mary Matossian discuss above). The President considers a partnership with Western capital to be indispensable at this stage of his country's evolution, and it is on this basis that he justifies the suppression of the miners' strike, as well as the introduction of preventive detention.

Yet while such fictionalised discussion (carried on at several levels throughout the novel) is immediately a demonstration of Bakhtinian "internal dialogisation" put to the purpose of debating the options available for nation-building, it is also established through these characters that neither ideologies nor intellectual positions occur in the world as disembodied theoretical abstractions. As a novelist Gordimer can go further than mere debate, by including within the same narrative details of the complex mix of personal histories and emotional motivation colouring any such confrontation---thereby uncovering how ideological disagreement is influenced by inter-personal rivalry, and how what appears to be powerful idealism (such as Shinza's) might also be contaminated by a thirst for power. As Tolstoy argues in the essay framing *War and Peace*, her novel demonstrates that it is always programmes, structures and ideas, the personalities enunciating and executing them, as well as the worlds in which they are released and in which their implications are variously realised by other selves on different levels, that all come together in an immensely multi-layered performance of national becoming, rather than privileging any single explanation, personality or hermeneutic horizon by which the direction of history is theoretically decided. Shinza's tirades against the neo-colonial dangers of allowing too much European capital to dictate the terms of investment, manipulate the infrastructure and exploit the wealth of a new country seem motivated by genuine apprehension that the basic aspirations of independence are thereby being undermined. But we also see him mobilising violence

along ethnic lines to destabilise the countryside, unscrupulously entering into deals with neighbouring insurgents, and planning linked coups without any evidence of ideological agreement, all of which results ultimately in national breakdown. Mweta the President, who can always disarm Bray with his sincerity in private conversation and claims to be the responsible 'pragmatist' who owes it to his society to make choices that will be unpopular in the short-term, also allows European firms their private armies, imposes more and more restrictive and permanent preventive detention laws, chooses to ignore how ordinary workers are murdered by Party hooligans for protesting or rallying, and finally has to call in British troops to keep himself in power when resistance to the anti-trade union laws of his regime develops into numerous nationwide rebellions, provoking the question asked by *Time* magazine in the novel:

Will the invasion-by-invitation of the former colonial master keep him in his seat and the country's gold and other valuable mineral resources in the hands of British and U.S. interests (509-510)?³⁷

Perhaps critics such as Aijaz Ahmad (and Ngugi) would complain of Gordimer's novel that its over-emphasised focus on the conflicts between the personalities and ideologies of a tiny cartel of nation-builders risks ignoring the numerous other levels on which national life does go on despite high-level, structural 'macro-failures'. But each novel can only commit itself to engagements with particular locations and dimensions of existence at the expense of others, and Gordimer through her focus can expose and critique precisely the fragility and the structurally un-democratic exclusiveness of a political culture where three or four individuals can exert such disproportionate influence upon a society's history (just as Achebe does in *A Man of the People* through portraying the consequences of the conflict between Odili and Nanga). In Gordimer's vision, it is clearly Mweta's unreserved embrace of the dictates of foreign capital and

³⁷ Gordimer's account of the constructions, transformations and impasses involved at each social level, from debates in national conferences to daily life in the cities and the countryside, in fashioning a post-apartheid South Africa (in *None To Accompany Me*) is no less dialogic, multi-layered, and specific.

the repressive re-organisation of the law and state machinery that follows in its wake, that is part of what leads to the new nation's disintegration. But neither are Shinza's Fanonian convictions ultimately presented as being much more impressive than an opposition politician's well-calculated rhetoric, which can be expediently jettisoned in his quest for power. Such a novel, rather than lacking stories of the lives of ordinary people, demonstrates the almost total absence of the people from the politics of their country, and actually mirrors the extent of their abandonment and violation. This continuing post-colonial non-involvement, this distance--- which implies that all the new nation's choices have been made for it by a tiny, self-seeking, alienated and arrogant elite, structurally perpetuated by choosing a particular paradigm of centralised statehood and a model of dependent capitalism--- is revealed to be the new nation's real tragedy.

'Interactive, Embodied Theories': Co-performing Diverse Ideas in Narrative.

As a historian, Basil Davidson traces the development of the political structures and choices underpinning such abandonment, covering in his account the same period in which most of the novels we have examined were written. He establishes how in the 1950's nationalists across Africa preparing for independence, had "with a few uninfluential exceptions"(1978, 228):

accepted the complete orthodoxy of the would-be bourgeois nation-state in wholesale and in detail [...] [arguing] that a privileged leadership, potentially a ruling middle class, should direct an economy of private capitalism and of state capitalism [...].

This being so, their duty was not to fill in the gap or widen the bridge across it, but to make sure that they became strong and numerous enough to dominate the crossing. With no gap and no close guard upon the bridge, there could be no middle class, or none that would be capable of holding power and deciding the future. On the contrary, there would be egalitarian confusion as the many invaded the privileges of the few; worse still, there might even be revolution. So it must be wise to call on mass support with a prudent eye to its dangers [...]. Their prudence and its consequences called forth a corresponding prudence

among the many, and this is what explains the atmosphere of doubt in villages and urban slums when independence came (229).³⁸

Davidson's historical narrative goes on to include substantial accounts of how the tiny ruling classes in many African societies, apparently for the purpose of preparing the entire nation for genuinely widespread capitalist 'take-off' into the "age of high mass consumption", embarked on the rapid and "ruthless policies" (315) of first accumulating the necessary capital for themselves, and the profoundly destabilising ramifications of such processes that led to coups and/or collapses into civil conflict in state after African state.³⁹

We have used aspects from various theories of nationalism and post-colonial nation-building throughout this section to find how our chosen novels have dissolved in narrative and investigated those same dimensions in their unique ways. In *A Guest of Honour*, we saw how the mutually exclusive interpretative possibilities offered by the functionalist perspectives of Gellner and Hobsbawm (in which nation-states are the infrastructure-creating engines of modernity, or the facilitating adjuncts of bourgeois capitalism), Tom Nairn's more integrated vision of nationalist solidarity being the essential ideological cushioning necessary to survive the uneven passage into a globalised capitalist modernity, as well as Fanon's and Ngugi's scathing analyses of

³⁸ Davidson's account stresses the essentially good faith in which such structural and distributive decisions might have been taken by the class assuming leadership. Reading him, it appears almost as if it was despite their best intentions not to betray the nationalist promise of betterment for the many after the end of foreign rule, that "they found themselves pushed increasingly into a colonialist posture towards all who were outside their ranks but who, in theory, were supposed to benefit from their labours" (305). For a fuller exposition see Davidson (1978, 305).

Ironically enough, in the matter of the behaviour of post-independence leaderships, everything Fanon anticipates as possibility Davidson later records as historical actuality. But very often, the same developments that make Fanon (and Achebe, Ngugi and Armah) entirely mistrustful of the motives of the ruling classes, Davidson interprets more generously.

³⁹ For a much fuller account, see Davidson (1978, 317-318).

both bourgeois nationalism and capitalist development, can be dialogically performed within the same novel, along with the numerous lives and worlds in which such ideas are enunciated and where the conflicts between them are enacted. In the same Tolstoyan/Bakhtinian/Lukacsian vein, many of the themes and questions Davidson raises through historical analysis, have also been examined thoroughly and variedly in these works. We have studied narrative envisionings of the leaders and the classes ruling these nations (in Achebe, Gordimer and Ngugi), as well as the devastating material implications of their decisions and actions upon the wider population---enacted in detail through the stories and voices of individually imagined characters. We have been able to explore the destabilising moral and cultural consequences (for individuals and groups) that result from the widely perceived failure of any idea of the nation as a shared undertaking. Most of all, we have witnessed all these aspects to a nation's life explored inextricably together, through the novel's ontological capacity for weaving the fullness of variously placed selves and their conflicting situations within the same narrative.

Of course, every novel is always only fictional and thereby 'experimental', with no possible claim to historical truth or accuracy in any immediately scrupulous sense. Besides, novels carry explicitly their acknowledgement of being both particular and partial, and can thereby always be supplemented with alternative re-tellings. But we do not mean to argue the historical actuality of a novel's content, only establish its existential relevance, which does not arise out of any claims of objective omniscience, factual accuracy or interpretative correctness, but out of being thoroughly engaged and 'worlded' despite 'only' being a fiction.

Stephen Clingman draws out another important implication of this particular mode of 'critical realist' fictionalising. In the novel, Bray's friends in London view his murder as inevitable, given their Conradian picture of Africa's unique, impenetrable, atavistic capacities for receding into cycles of violence. Yet, in calling Gordimer's novel a work of "African socialist realism" (1986, 127), Clingman makes the point that in its methods as well as in its vision of an African society's history, it could not be more different from the outlook of a novel such as *Heart of Darkness*. The landscapes that are presented in Conrad's novel as sites of primordial, savage mystery, are for Gordimer material to be thoroughly detailed, politicised and historicised--- in a word, humanised. Clingman distinguishes how "the 'unspeakable horror' Conrad projects onto Africa as its supposedly archetypal embodiment is here broken down into questions of historical struggle" (127). Gordimer thus establishes that a new nation's becoming--- however complex, multi-layered and utterly in process (or crisis) it may be--- can be narrated through specific and dynamic portraits of its multiple contexts, and proves how suited the novel might be for such an undertaking. This is a vital political and ultimately human point for such novels to be demonstrating, in response to the prejudices of Eurocentric narratives that go back to Hegel and Marx (and long before them), and extend beyond Conrad, Joyce Cary and Isak Dinesen even to Marxist historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, all of whom, despite the differences between them, have in common varying degrees of characterising African existence as static, childlike, outside of any processes of historical transformation and thereby beyond analysis at best, and inexpressibly primordial, irrationally atavistic, and unquantifiably violent at worst.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ It should also be added that such novelising also explicitly responds to the disillusionment of writers such as Armah, in whose work even the physical environment of Ghana is found to be irredeemably conducive to corruption, as well as the judgements of 'travellers' such as V.S. Naipaul, the sheer variety of whose dismissals of entire environments, societies, and histories, would be ill-served by a single footnote, though we encounter it in more detail in an Indian setting in Section 4, when discussing the work of R K Narayan.

The Fictionality of Lukacsian Objectivity.

Lukacs would argue that in her portrayal of the cognitive limits and crises of each of her major characters, Gordimer proves herself to be an exemplary 'realist', who depicts exactly the dynamic relationships between each individual story and how it arises from and is to be understood within the vast portrait she has created of the 'totality of life' in this society. He has written admiringly of Thomas Mann in this regard:

Precisely because [Mann] is a true realist, [...] he knows exactly who Christian Buddenbrooks is, who Tonio Kroeger and who Hans Castorp, Settembrini and Naphta are [...]. He knows it after the manner of a creative realist: he knows how thoughts and feelings grow out of the life of society and how experiences and emotions are parts of the total complex of reality. As a realist he assigns these parts to their rightful place within the total life context. He shows what area of society they arise from and where they are going to (Leitch et al, 2002, 1039).

Lukacs's well-known rejection of what he saw as the 'surrealist' and 'expressionist' distortions in much of the art of his time are premised on precisely the absence (in such works) of an apparently 'objective' underlying world-vision, that would always locate any subjective particularities within a greater 'realist' portrait of that society's dynamics. Thus his mistrust of the significance of writers such as Joyce and Woolf may be traced to the fact that their novels seem to identify subjective states of mind "directly and unreservedly with reality itself". By placing so much of their narrative within the consciousnesses of particular characters without providing any counterbalancing 'objective' frame of reference for the reader's orientation, such modernism "equates the highly distorted image created in this state of mind with the thing itself, instead of objectively unravelling the essence, the origins and the mediation of the distortion by comparing it with reality" (Leitch et al, 2002, 1038). For Lukacs, 'true realism' and such limited 'subjectivist' modernism are therefore "opposed views of the world--- dynamic and developmental on the one hand, static and sensational on the other" (1964, 19). Man, for such modernist writers, "is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (20). Yet "this implies

[...] also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence. Man, thus conceived, is an ahistorical being” (21). But when Lukacs’ admired realists, (Tolstoy, Mann, etc.) portray solitude or isolation:

It is always merely a fragment, a phase, a climax or anti-climax, in the life of a community as a whole. The fate of such individuals is characteristic of certain human types in specific social or historical circumstances. Beside and beyond their solitariness, the common life, the strife and togetherness of other human beings, goes on as before. In a word, their solitariness is a specific social fate, not a universal *condition humaine* (20).

Yet we shall argue that through such a qualitative distinction between modes of novelising, Lukacs elides fully acknowledging not only the fictionality and the limits of his own prescribed methods for constructing comprehensive and apparently ‘objective’ totalities, but also misses a quality fundamental to fiction itself which overarches and subsumes the differences between one kind of novelising and another, and is crucial to its capacity for evoking the multiplicity of human voices, perspectives, and trajectories. In the opening chapter, we presented (as an implicit extension of fiction’s ontological orientation towards the fullness of existence) the corollary that any voice, perspective, existential dimension or life-history may find equally valid accommodation within the pages of a novel. Thus voices and world-views coloured by madness, error, or delusion, for instance, are all equally worthy subjects (and subjectivities) for a novel, just from the sheer ‘truth’ of their existence as expressible dimensions of being human. We also argued that this inclusive capacity has significant (and at least potentially radical) re-ordering implications, especially though by no means exclusively for a post-colonial writer; because anyone ever written out by another’s conception of an ‘objective totality’ can be re-inscribed equally validly within the ambit of an alternative narration. In fact, we posited that it is one of fiction’s singular attributes, perhaps uniquely among discourses, that various mutually contradictory envisionings can co-exist with equal legitimacy (both within the same novel and as separate works on the same subjects)

precisely because fiction cannot claim, and does not require, either fullness or finality in order to justify its existence.

It would be besides our purpose to refute at length Lukacs' conceptions of either 'objectivity' or all-encompassing 'totalities', the illusion of which he claims is achievable within the limits of a novel through the narrating of what is "typical", "fundamental" and "enduring". We need only indicate how subjective, constructed, and illusory (not to mention coercive) all such conceptions must be, unless we understand them to be deterministic, didactic essentialisms which bind the transmission of interpretations that occur in a novel into predictable, pedagogic relationships, where each writer and reader always sends and receives the same world pictures of 'objective totalities'.⁴¹ We argue the contrary--- that it is only after the abandoning of such characterisations (and ambitions) that the true range of the novel's narrative possibilities can begin to be recognised, when multiplicity for its own sake, rather than totality, is our criterion, and when we look for aspects of the fullness of existence to be evoked, not for all of it to be apparently circumscribed. This is not to deny that Gordimer's novel does not manage to perform together many inter-related aspects of a nation's life, but merely to point out that no matter how comprehensive her content, she cannot ever claim completeness. Both Bakhtin and Tolstoy, who share in different ways Lukacs' belief in the unique narrative capacities of the novel, explicitly warn against pressing any such claims in the direction of finality or even positivist historical 'knowledge'. Though Lukacs accuses virtually every 'modernist' work that he does not admire of the offences of being ahistorical, reductive, and static, it is actually such prescriptive writing paradigms and fixed interpretative schema as he proposes that risk being thus characterised, in always demanding the same methods in every diverse narrative instance.

⁴¹ Also, how many fully 'objective totalities' can there be, after one has been achieved?

Through our study of Rushdie in the next section we build on such disagreements, to demonstrate not only the significance of rejecting any such restrictive (and illusory) interpretative absolutes, but also to prove that the range of existential examination achieved by 'non-realist' modes of narrating are no less comprehensive or 'worlded'. In fact, such variety actually allows the novel to be thoroughly specific and historicised by being inclusive of voices and locations in all their individual inflections and circumstances. We will show through our readings of *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* how each distinct narratorial vision may be seen as an existential essay, another perspective on interpreting and inhabiting history that also foregrounds its own status as both experiment and fiction, rather than pretending any achievement of an 'objective totality'. Further, different narrative castings both challenge and supplement the worlds uncovered by each other, and taken together, the greater the range of voice, perspective and trajectory encompassed by post-colonial novels, the more such discourse might cumulatively work as an enhanced evocation of the fullness of a society's existence.

How Content Transforms Form in the Novels of Salman Rushdie.

In a much contested proposition that we return to at length in another section, Fredric Jameson presents what he confesses to be a "sweeping hypothesis", apparently encompassing "what all third-world cultural productions seem to have in common" (2000, 320):

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic--- necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society* (320).

To Jameson, political commitment “conventionally”, “in the culture of the Western realist and modernist novel” (320), is always “recontained and psychologised or subjectivised [...] and accounted for in terms of the subjective dynamics of *ressentiment* or the authoritarian personality” (322). The premise for such a hermeneutic tendency lies in the “radical split” he detects within wider Western culture: “between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx” (320). He continues:

We have been trained in a deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics. Politics in our novels therefore is, according to Stendhal’s canonical formulation, a “pistol shot in the middle of a concert” (32).

Jameson then argues the “inversion” of such a proposition in “third-world culture”, where, to him, “psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms” (322).

Each of Jameson’s formulations in this essay have been severely challenged on various grounds,⁴² but whatever legitimate disputes might continue about the self-confessedly “sweeping” range and absoluteness of their categories, they certainly bear relevance to introducing Rushdie’s narrative project in the two novels we examine. The related problems of inhabiting, interpreting, and simultaneously attempting to represent in narrative a national atmosphere in which the actions, choices and becomings of lives unrelentingly translate/reverberate on multiple levels --- the inner, the inter-personal, the familial, the political and national-historical--- form the central thematic of both *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and *Midnight’s Children*. Through his first-person entirely ‘non-objective’ narratives, Rushdie interrogates the implications of inhabiting the post-

⁴² This falls outside the ambit of our argument, but see Aijaz Ahmad’s well-known critique ‘Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory’ (1994, 95-122).

colonial nation from the perspective of the individual self, as both Moor and Saleem Sinai attempt to interpret their own lives despite being immersed in what they portray as the irrepressibly multiple nature of “the torrential reality of India” (Rushdie, 1995, 45). It is the strain of such attempts to articulate viable interpretations both of themselves and their irresistibly influential national environments that is shown to affect everything in their narrating: tone, perspective, genre. Thus the themes Rushdie interrogates are bound up integrally with his chosen forms and adopted voices, and allow him to ask his preoccupying question: how can nations hold together as stable, coherent entities if they are merely the overwhelmingly indivisible, aggregate worlds composed of selves interacting in relentlessly dynamic becoming? Any formal pretence of Gordimeresque omniscience would be at odds with Rushdie’s distinct thematic purpose. Moor defends his narrative practice against any attackers who might seek ‘realistic’ ‘objective totalities’:

Banished from the natural, what choice did I have but to embrace its opposite? Which is to say, *unnaturalism*, the only realism of these back-to-front and jabberwocky days. Placed beyond the Pale, would you not seek to make light of the Dark? Just so. Moraes Zogoiby, expelled from his story, tumbled towards history” (1995, 5).

The Personal as the National: India as Existential Environment in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* and *Midnight’s Children*.

In both novels, it is primarily the family that is revealed to be the deepest threat to the narrator’s being, the focal point of his severest examination. This is partly because their families are inseparable from their most intimate circumstances, but further, in all of Rushdie’s households, familial loves, hates, and conflicts are shown to amplify into wider dimensions of consequence and implication that merge with unusual violence the public and the private, the familial and the historical. Both Saleem and Moor, by ties of blood or acquaintance, are related to an entire spectrum of public figures ranging from

rulers of the underworld to the leader of a Hindu nationalist party, and including coup-plotting generals as well as some of the country's most important painters and singers. Not only does such a strategy enable Rushdie to explore the conflicts, workings, and failings of those social classes that assumed leadership in various sectors of the post-independence nation, he also puts their versions of India through further examination by having his protagonists metamorphically inhabit each of their alternative national envisionings during the enactment of their own lives. And most of all, dissolving so many conflicting agents, world-views and dimensions within the same narratives allows Rushdie to interrogate some of the heterogeneous yet concurrent themes and histories operating within a society that might otherwise be subsumed under official histories of the nation--- such as the influences of inhabiting the family, the city, the particular social classes (mis)ruling the new country, as well as the histories of various minorities (Jews, Muslims, Christians) and their multiple roles within society. In a Deleuzian formulation, Moor further articulates his novelistic right not to conform to any imposed model of 'objective totality' and to go about portraying his environment from his own particular 'minoritarian' perspective, that will eventually, and inevitably, include engagement with the more obviously 'major' themes of national history:

No. Sahibzadas. Madams-O: No way. Majority, that mighty elephant, and her sidekick, Major-Minority, will not crush my tale beneath her feet. Are not my personages Indian, every one? Well, then: this too is an Indian yarn. That's one answer; but there's another: everything in its place. Elephants are promised for later. Majority and Major-Minority will have their day, and much that has been beautiful will be tusked and trampled by their flap-eared, trumpeting herds. Until then, I continue to guzzle this last supper (1995, 87).

Even as a little girl, Aurora in *The Moor's Last Sigh* portrays through her very first mural her latent sense that privacy "was an illusion and this mountain, this hive, this endlessly metamorphic line of humanity was the truth" (1995, 60). It is an impression of "the great swarm of [Indian] being" (59) created within her just from being a child in an explosive, divided family. For her father, who is viewing the mural:

The rapid rush of the composition drew him onwards, away from the personal and into the throng, for beyond and around and above and below and amongst the family was the crowd itself, the dense crowd, the crowd without boundaries; Aurora had composed her giant work in such a way that the images of her own family had to fight their way through this hyper-abundance of imagery [...].

And it was all set in a landscape that made Camoens tremble to see it, for it was Mother India herself, Mother India with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion, Mother India who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave (60-61).

It is an image of the unbounded interactivity of Indian existence that is repeated almost verbatim at the end of *Midnight's Children*, and both narratives are suffused with an awed awareness of the inexorably multiplying implications and rate of becomings generated by such Being. In Moor's family, which in its infighting resembles the "largest, hottest dish of curry ever cooked" (38), "the grave settles no quarrels", and the living must find what space they can alongside the "giant dead", the "unended, endlessly ending dead" (136). For Rushdie's narrators, everything human, past and present, familial and historical, is hybrid in both source and potential and full of multivalent layers of possibility and meaning; and their narratives examine the destabilising implications of inhabiting worlds made up exclusively of such overwhelming multiplicity. The most idealistic dream expressed by Moor is the possibility of love as the containment and celebration of being immersed in the all-dissolving dynamism of human becoming: "as the blending of spirits, as melange, as the triumph of the impure, mongrel, conjoining best of us over what there is in us of the solitary, the isolated, the austere, the dogmatic, the pure" (289). But within his story, love is only another current of "relentless, inexhaustible" involvement in the unpredictable transitions of other lives that can provide no basis on which to build either any conception of the self or any form of community. On the contrary, 'love' proves to be the pretext for further violation, more evidence of the "polymorphous power of the perverse" (124), that progressively reduces him until he has been "flayed" into "a shape without frontiers, a self without walls" (288). His mother Aurora more than anyone comes to embody this failure. Once she attains adulthood, the

entire cast of the novel is gathered around her as lovers of one sort or another, filial or sexual--- and in Moor's version of events everything that follows, resulting in the ultimate destruction of the entire city (and by implication, the Indian nation), are various reactive translations of these loves and their miscarriages.⁴³ But such a degree of immersed and multivalent 'worldedness' works both ways: just as often as familial incidents and agents magnify outwards to influence history, outside events also initiate domestic upheavals, forever altering the direction of the narrators' lives. Most of Saleem Sinai's family is annihilated in the 1965 war during a single night of Indian bombing. And it is a pattern that runs pervasively throughout society, all the way to the Prime Minister:

Mrs. Gandhi returned to power, so it turned out that there was no final morality in affairs of state, only Relativity. I remembered Vasco Miranda's 'Indian variation upon the theme of Einstein's General Theory: *Everything is for relative. Not only light bends, but everything. For relative we can bend a point, bend the truth, bend employment criteria, bend the law. D equals mc squared, where D is for dynasty, m is for mass of relatives, and c of course is for corruption, which is the only constant in the universe* (1995, 272).

Thus Rushdie's novelistic investigations that interactively juxtapose the familial with the national-historical through its focus on the nation's ruling, shaping and interpreting classes, also work to illustrate the implications of Partha Chatterjee's argument concerning the problematic separation of existential 'domains' by nineteenth-century (and contemporary) Indian nationalists, into the dynamic but less 'significant' material-political and the 'timeless' spiritual-familial, (where, according to Chatterjee, nationalism considered itself to have forged its own irreducible, 'essential' identities). We have seen how R. Radhakrishnan, commenting on Chatterjee, illuminates the dichotomy Moor and Saleem confront unrelentingly throughout their narratives:

The place where the *true* nationalist subject *really is* and the place from which it produces historical-materialist knowledge about itself are mutually heterogeneous. The locus of the true self, the inner/traditional/spiritual sense of place, is exiled from processes of history while the locus of historical

⁴³ Moor's characterisation of Aurora is re-examined in more detail in the next section.

knowledge fails to speak for the true identity of the nationalist subject. The result is a fundamental rupture, a form of basic cognitive dissidence, a radical collapse of representation (Castle, 2001, 197-198).

By examining precisely those domains of social existence, the home and the family, and by portraying their roles in shaping national history as multifarious and dynamic to the point of being entirely destabilising, Rushdie's narratives demonstrate some of the fundamental fallacies resulting from such a cognitive separation, and perform their continuance in a post-independence Indian environment. Lukacsian 'objective realism' would be entirely misplaced here.

The Impossibility of Building Nations.

As we have noted already, these narrators' lives take them through many concurrent yet entirely contradictory enactments of the multiple possibilities that form part of the nation's becomings--- various opposed social dimensions as well as would-be nation-builders and the performance of their visions. At one time or another Moor and Saleem consider them all as possible 'parents' and try out each of their world-views experimentally, thereby narrating both horizontally their experience of going from one such envisioning to another, as well as vertically in moving downward from their wealthy upbringings to the city's prisons and pavements. Thus we get dynamic and comprehensive portraits of their worlds even if viewed from entirely subjective perspectives, in watching Moor embrace both Nehru's plural, hybrid, tolerant India which he affirms to his dying breath, as well as Mainduck's violent and exclusivist vision of a purely Hindu India, for which he becomes a contracted hitman, while Saleem evolves from being the head of the Midnight Children's Conference planning new destinies for the Indian nation into a human bloodhound for the Pakistani army during a war against India. Yet, when the communal malevolence expressed during Bombay's Hindu-Muslim riots is revealed by Abraham to have actually been orchestrated underworld showdowns between himself and Mainduck (who are also possibly rivals

for the love of his mother Aurora), it confirms for Moor an image of the nation's multi-layered infinity, as impossible to interpret as it is to inhabit. Such themes, subjects and perspectives must radically and decisively affect form and narration. It would be absurd to impose either 'critical objectivity' or narratorial omniscience upon subject matter thus envisioned:

The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings, [...] how could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? [...] How could we have lived authentic lives? How could we have failed to be grotesque (1995, 184-185)?

In such an environment, Moor finds that everyone is "trapped [...] in the hundred percent fakery of the real" (184), and that the expedient collaborations necessitated by organised crime form the only "dark, ironic victory for India's deep-rooted secularism" (332). On the eve of independence, Vasco drunkenly declares that corruption is the only force that could defeat fanaticism in an independent, multi-ethnic India. But even if that were true as the diagnosis of a dominant 'national essence', it holds out scarcely more hope for any directed or regulated formation of the new nation. The infinitely translatable capacity for corruption that Moor uncovers in the Bombay underworld is as solvent as the human potential all around him for multivalent becomings; neither can ever be made to cohere into the irreducible stability essential for any nation-building (just as it cannot be narrated in any form of unproblematic realism).

Yet despite every definitional crisis, Saleem in *Midnight's Children* is far less prepared than Moor to leave off the "longing for form": for a credible self, an all-encompassing meaningful narrative as well as a directed and purposeful Indian nation. He sees himself at the head of an age of builders that he has great ideas for. He never ceases to wring meaning from the coincidence of his hour of birth, and wonder about what it implies to be "handcuffed to history" (1981, 11), and how "may the career of a single

individual be said to impinge on the fate of a nation" (232)? Thus a thousand contemporaneously born children with nothing else in common between them become through his mediation a nation-building *conference*, as "a thousand and one possibilities which had never been present in one place at one time before" (197). His consciousness of the possibilities of such a conference is immense: if India was the "new myth--- a collective fiction in which anything was possible", "a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will--- except in a dream we all agreed to dream" (111), then "all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents-- the children of midnight were also the children of the time: fathered, you understand by history" (117).

But his attempts to impose parliamentary purpose and meaning disintegrate when the children reveal nothing unusual about themselves except for their gifts: "their heads are full of all the usual things, fathers mothers money food land possessions fame power God. Nowhere, in the thoughts of the conference, could I find anything as new as ourselves" (223). And when the State machinery during the Emergency reveals *its* purpose in destroying this conference of potential nation-builders, Saleem (in an Armahesque vein of disenchantment) is moved to conclude that perhaps their true meaning might have lain in their "annihilation", "that [they] would have no meaning until [they] were destroyed" (223).

Much more than Moor's, Saleem's narrative realises the possibility of individual instances of love: Mary Pereira, Padma, Parvati (the only other midnight's child to love him). But fleeting links of inter-personal love cannot add up to the construction of nations, when they do not even hold selves together with any degree of permanence. Saleem's last expressible image is of "the crowd, "the dense crowd, the crowd without boundaries" (445), in which he is "alone in the vastness of the numbers, his body

being “buffeted right and left while rip tear crunch reaches its climax” (445). It is a crowd that includes both family and strangers, but that will trample over generations of selves and aspiring nation-builders:

Until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and curse of midnight’s children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace (446).

Crises of Representation: Co-performing Formal and Thematic Crises in Narrative.

In various arguments throughout *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said wonders if the power to narrate always implies the power to dominate the subjects being narrated. But through ironising Saleem and his ultimately woeful incompetence at either inhabiting or interpreting his world, Rushdie can expose the limits of any such attempt at what we earlier termed Said’s conception of ‘narrative imperialism’. It is finally the failure to establish either a credibly autonomous and irreducible portrait of individual selfhood or any smaller-scale form of human community (even within inter-personal relationships and families), that for Rushdie underlies the failure to establish any kind of willed, creative, organised community on a national level. If all Being is only the aggregate of infinite becomings and their reactive implications, with no autonomous human units demonstrably able to initiate, fraternise, or redirect anything in their lives against such a relentless onrush, how can any stable community (or even a conception of individual selfhood) ever cohere even momentarily? Aurora proclaims: “human perversity is greater than human heroism, [...] or cowardice [...] or art. [...] For there are limits to these things, there are points beyond which we will not go in their name; but to perversity there is no limit set, no frontier that anyone has found. Whatever today’s excess, tomorrow’s will exceed-o it” (1995, 124). For Rushdie’s narrators, India as an existential environment is an overwhelming given, but the question of India as a nation-

state or any manner of community that can overcome or endure chaos remains entirely unresolved. In both novels, in trying to locate the evidence for autonomous selfhood and possibilities of community through their lives and their attempts to interpret them, the protagonists performatively examine if being-in-the-world ever amounts to more than the pervasive impinging of the world upon their beings. What is the primary motoring force behind the inexorable becomings that constitute the lives of human beings---the will of the active self or the mere sum of its reactions to the rest of existence?

A young Moor has two visions of a dream of complete autonomy---or even more---of attaining to a state of pure Being: one is of "peeling off [his] skin plantain-fashion, of going forth naked into the world, [...] set free from the otherwise inescapable jails of colour, race and clan" (1995, 136). In the other he is "able to peel away more than skin, [...] [and] float free of flesh, skin and bone, having become simply an intelligence or a feeling set loose in the world, at play in its fields, like a science-fiction glow which needed no physical form" (136). But Moor never achieves the bodiless potentiality he aspires to; for Rushdie's narrators is reserved the unrelenting implications of being thoroughly immersed in the world. In both novels, Rushdie creates 'magic realist' conceits to be able to evoke such an overwhelming sense of subjective existence: Moor physically deteriorates twice as fast as his actual age, while Saleem Sinai's body begins to crack up even as he is telling his story until by the end of the novel, large bits of him are falling off. For both Moor and Saleem, the activity of narrating itself becomes their desperate performance of self-establishment, and the surrealist exaggerations attempt to describe what it is to be the paranoid, obsessive focus of such a perspective. Is there a self outside of its inextricable immersion--- Saleem and Moor ask through the simultaneous activities of inhabiting, interpreting and representing in narrative--- is there anything irreducible about their being-in-the-world that is distinguishable from the influences of the world? Rushdie's investigations stand at the opposite end from

solipsism or what Lukacs reductively characterises as ‘modernist’ alienation: the fact that there are selves dynamically making up the world around his narrators is indisputable, but the nature of human autonomy remains no less of an enigma. There comes a time in both novels when Saleem and Moor are wiped clean by disaster and remake themselves towards entirely new purposes--- of perpetrating violence and committing murder--- to see if this would lead to an emergence of their ‘true’ natures. But in neither case does this prove to be a final phase of becoming, and even such capacity for existential metamorphosis brings no lasting certainties.

In a sense, these narratives reverse, and by their persistent refusal of ‘realism’, challenge and ‘delegitimate’ the priorities of a ‘nation-building novel’, as Kwame Appiah would argue,⁴⁴ by negatively demonstrating that stable nations can only be constructed towards definite purposes if there are irreducibly autonomous and stable selves, and other social structures and relationships, to gather together, form the material, and provide the basis for such building. Both Rushdie’s protagonists include worlds in their storytelling, narrate events as if their lives affect entire eras, and their actions begin and end epochs. But such self-aggrandisement barely conceals the opposite obsession--- the possibility that they might not even be selves at all. Saleem Sinai’s exaggerated conceit of “being mysteriously handcuffed to history, [his] destinies indissolubly chained to those of [his] country” (1981, 11), is simultaneously a narrative effort to contain and confront an equally extreme paranoia, that arises from

⁴⁴ This refers to Appiah’s distinction between what he classes as ‘realist’ novels of the “first stage” of African decolonisation, among which he includes *Things Fall Apart*, that he then characterises sweepingly as being “realist legitimations of nationalism”; “celebratory” narratives that “authorise a ‘return to tradition’ while at the same time recognising the demands of a Weberian rationalised modernity” (1992, 242). Even though we argue its applicability in the case of Rushdie, it is an ultimately unsatisfactory distinction, slightly facile in its binary opposition. Appiah’s argument carries echoes of (and updates for a post-independence African nationalist purpose) Said’s casting of the English nineteenth-century realist novel as being essentially a predictably coercive affirmation of bourgeois-capitalist principles in each individual instance. We return to his argument and its succeeding stages in Section Four, but for now it is enough to point to all the evidence gathered from our readings of Achebe and Gordimer that their work is ‘realist’ enough, but certainly not celebratory or legitimating of nationalist positions in any explicit or dogmatically consistent ways.

“the terrible notion that I, alone in the universe, had no idea of what I should be, or how I should behave” (152). But his panic is about more than purposelessness---only by such outrageous displays of egotism can he exist amid the outrageous pressures and violations of the world that he is immersed in. Saleem, in hindsight, comes to acknowledge “that the spirit of self-aggrandisement” which seized him was “a reflex, born of an instinct of self-preservation. If I had not believed myself in control of the flooding multitudes, their massed identities would have annihilated mine” (172).

As much as Moor, Saleem examines if there is more to the Indian self than the historical-political-familial--- if the self is infinite or if it is actually nothing, there being no stable sum to all these extrinsic components. But where a later and older Moor cannot conclude that there is anything irreducible about his individual being apart from the chaos-ridden resultant of its multiple becomings, Saleem’s central ploy against his paranoia is his conceit of “swallowing”: “I have been a swallower of lives, and to know me, just the one of me, you’ll have to swallow the lot as well” (11). He defies the likelihood of being nothing with the audacity of claiming that he might be infinite. This involves incorporating diverse lives and incidents if there is the slightest chance they may have impinged on his own story, and then recasting them in his telling as having flowed out from or towards him in the first place. There is as much helpless irony as there is egotism in his description of events that took place even before his birth as having been part of his “beginning to take [his] place at the centre of the universe”, and his life as the conferring of “meaning to it all” (126). He wonders often at the extent of his self-importance, asking why Saleem Sinai, “perennial victim, persists in seeing himself as protagonist” (232). If he is indeed “the sort of person *to whom things have been done*” (232), if his is the sort of life where “most of what matters takes place in [his] absence” (230), he confronts such actuality head-on with his interpretative swallowing: “if I seem a little bizarre, remember the wild profusion of my

inheritance... perhaps, if one wishes to remain an individual in the midst of the teeming multitudes, one must make oneself grotesque” (108).

In thus recreating himself as the “mirror” of the nation (122), Saleem finds he can enter into the “illusion of the artist”, that he is “somehow creating a world, that the thoughts [he] jumps inside are [*his*], that the bodies he occupies act at [*his*] command”, that the “multitudinous realities of the land” are “the raw unshaped material of [*his*] gift” (172). Now, armed with the novelistic right to *re-present* thus, perhaps he can counter the influence of his immersion within his world, as well as the possibility that he is nothing apart from such immersion. Again, the activities of inhabiting, interpreting and narrating are shown to be intimately related, and the impossibility of representing convincingly autonomous selves or regulated directions in national history is reflected formally through the complete absence of either ‘objectivity’ or ‘reliable’ realism:

There are imperatives, and logical-consequences, and inevitabilities, and recurrences; there are things-done-to, and accidents, and bludgeonings-of-fate; when was there ever a choice? When options? When a decision freely-made, to be this or that or the other? No choice; begin. --- Yes (1981, 407).

Nationalist Art and National Representation.

By tracing the phases of Aurora’s development as one of the nation’s leading artists in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*--- which allows Moor to discuss various possibilities for the representation of the new nation through its artworks--- Rushdie performs even further a Tolstoyan, meta-fictional meditation on the diverse formal modes and envisioning possibilities explored within his own fictionalising. After the earliest mural by Aurora which captures godlessly the “great swarm of being itself” (1995, 59), of India past, present and limitless in all “her garishness and inexhaustible motion”, as a young adult she moves into the Chipkali phase which portrays the variety and disaffection of lower class Bombay life. As in Moor’s own narrative Aurora returns repeatedly to depicting India in “the mythic-romantic mode in which history, family, politics and

fantasy jostled each other" (203) in one great throng. We witness conflicting depictions of the worlds around her, in the way that Aurora moves from the "vivid surrealism" and "dynamic acceleration" (227) of her "Mooristan" or "Palimpstine" period--- which are places "where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away; [...] one universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under, or on top of" (226)--- to her later collages that include every manner of found urban "jetsam" thrown together, but also visualise humanity itself as "reduced to the status of junk" (302), where "the people's lives, under the pressure that is only felt at the bottom of a heap, had also become composite, as patched up as their homes"(302). Correspondingly, in her pictures as much as in his own narrative, we watch Moor's transformation by degrees as an approximate symbol for the new nation. From being portrayed "as a romantic myth of the plural, hybrid nation" (227), "a unifier of opposites [and] a standard-bearer of pluralism" (303) during the Palimpstine phase, in these later pictures he too becomes "a semi-allegorical figure of decay", "a creature of shadows" (303):

Aurora had apparently decided that the ideas of impurity, cultural admixture and melange which had been, for most of her creative life, the closest things she had found to a notion of the Good, were in fact capable of distortion, and contain a potential for darkness as well as for light. This 'black Moor' was a new imagining of the idea of the hybrid--- a Baudelarian flower, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest, of evil (303).

Conclusion: Discourse that is Situated and Comprehensive, Experimental and Self-Reflexive.

Considered from a more 'objective' perspective than Rushdie's narrators, it is as possible to characterise his narratives by their limits and exclusions as by their thematic pre-occupations. We might disagree with his valorisation of the city as the vital site of national formation and point at the obvious class boundaries of his casts (though part of his project is to expose this 'nation-controlling' elite and its limitations--- as artists, politicians, generals and businessmen). There is his often ahistorical insistence on the

pervasive and incommensurable uncontrollability of human becoming as the primary reason for the failure of the nation on every level. And finally, there is the question in both narratives of what emerges as a paranoid suspicion of the 'subaltern', as well as an inability to invest such characters with any degree of creative agency or complexity.

Among others, Leela Gandhi takes such criticisms forward in two distinct but related directions. In the work of novelists such as Rushdie as well as thinkers such as Bhabha and Said, she detects a "theoretical faith" reserved only for "counter-narratives of the nation" that, "far from producing the nation out of its fictional plenitude [...] endeavour, instead, to betray the fictionality of nationhood" (1998, 162):

In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the nation is narrated by an impostor--- whose unreliable narration systematically distorts the chronology and significance of national history. So also *Shame* gives the lie to the national achievements of Pakistan--- leaving in its place, a hollow and corrupt landscape bereft of hope and meaning (164).

Gandhi points to, and then questions, how "the evacuated and fictional space of nationalism is now animated by the new fictions of exile and migrancy":

To put this differently, need we concede the necessary 'politics of migrancy'? Especially when we consider that the migrancy of writers like Rushdie is predicated upon the luxuries of mobility. [...]

In the absence of any solidarities--- whether nationalist or socialist--- the postcolonial novel finds its provenance in the small pleasures of subjectivity; its content is almost entirely shaped by personal journeys, attachments, memories, losses. Accordingly, it seems more than a little curious that these iterative and skilful portraits of artists as young--- and not so young--- men should be authorised to represent the public voice of the postcolonial world. [...] This is not to suggest that postcolonial writing is obliged to be unthinkingly 'patriotic'. Rather we might consider the fact that Rushdie's narrative renditions of the Indian nation have always been pathologically and unequivocally reductive. What he offers in novel after novel is a lament, or a complaint against the culture he has eschewed for the transitions of migrancy. [...] This, then, is the governing paradox of the postcolonial canon: that metropolitan culture has acquired a romantic investment in a literary narrative which is markedly anti-romantic in its perception of the post-colonial world. Here we can only find the language of critique; a hybridity that is predicated precisely upon an abrogation of the postcolonial nation. And yet, despite the influential liberal enmity towards nationalism, this abstract and imaginary force bears [...] the traces of countless histories of struggles--- histories which, in turn, continue to inform the ethical apparatus of countless peoples (164-166).

We have quoted Gandhi extensively because her severe critique contains many points on which we might build (by our refutation) an alternative rendering not just of Rushdie's novels, but of the cumulative implications of post-colonial literary production more generally. While the charge that Saleem and Moor are both "unreliable narrators" who "systematically distort the chronology [...] of national history" is undeniable and obvious, it cannot by any means extend to saying that therefore "Rushdie's narrative renditions [...] have always been pathologically and unequivocally reductive" (165). On the contrary, through our readings we have tried to demonstrate exactly how much comprehensive national interrogation his work undertakes, in terms of including diverse, conflicting social agents and various existential dimensions simultaneously within the same narratives. Not only do his novels thereby realise the potential for evoking the fullness of existence that we have argued to be intrinsic to fiction (and press such capacities into the services of national examination), they also foreground throughout the limits of their own 'fictionality' rather than pretend the opposite--- which would involve assuming the omniscient authority of constructing an apparently 'objective totality'. In Rushdie, there is no effort to conceal the limits of the inevitable (and unreliable) particularism of *all* fiction behind the Lukacsian ploys of claiming to concentrate on only what is 'typical' or 'enduring' or 'universal', which means that his fictions confront much more directly the diagnostic implications of their particular social situation, their specific modes of 'worldedness'. Thus there is no grand contention--- that is not immediately ironised by Saleem and Moor themselves--- that sets up either narrative as an alternative "national history" in the sense that Gandhi criticises, by pretending to be "authorised to represent the public voice of the postcolonial world" (1998, 164). Rather, as both Moor and Saleem proclaim frequently at different points:

"I told you the truth", I say yet again, "Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own" (Rushdie, 1981, 207).

Gandhi's criticism censures Rushdie's work for mutually exclusive offences--- by acknowledging that he foregrounds the explicit unreliability of his narratives but not accepting the eccentric consequences of such unreliability, and condemning the absence (*as well as* the delusory appearance) of historical objectivity in his writing. Further, there occurs a problematic conflation of textual and biographical criticism in Gandhi's charge that these novels valorise a historically irresponsible, privileged, cosmopolitan migrancy at the expense of the Indian nation.⁴⁵ If we consider just the textual worlds of these two novels for our present purposes, not only do we note situated and comprehensive engagements with wholly Indian histories and environments (albeit engagements not suited to Gandhi's taste), but the only migration that eventually happens--- when Moor flees to Spain--- is portrayed as a final failure compounding his (interpretative and existential) failures on Indian territory.

If, as we argued in the first chapter, a fundamental possibility offered by novelistic discourse is the opportunity to re-write fictions impelled by the lacks and limits in the fictions of others, then every succeeding writer must be equally liable to fresh examinations of his or her particular methods and exclusions. But the crucial basis of any such process is the freedom that the form allows in the first place--- of envisioning existence experimentally from any expressible perspective. Surely Rushdie is only exercising fiction's implicit invitation to speak in any voice and construct his story in the specific sequence he chooses. We are free to disagree with the selection of histories constituting Saleem's India; in fact, it would run counter to his own fore-grounded unreliability and to the very *fictionality* of the medium if we accepted his depiction as 'objective'. But we cannot obstruct his right even to be entirely 'wrong' without seriously undermining (and misunderstanding) the inclusive potential of the novel, by imposing upon it Lukacsian constraints and criteria for what constitutes a more

⁴⁵ Timothy Brennan makes this particular 'cosmopolitan' case in detail in his book-length study of Rushdie. For a fuller account see Brennan (1989, 35-38).

‘objectively’ accurate portrayal of national history. In fact, through the range of investigations undertaken by the novels in this second section, we have attempted to demonstrate the discursive fertility of each novel’s particular portrayals, as well as that generated by *dissent* with the limits of a particular portrayal. It is often disagreement with the exclusions or methods of one novel that leads to alternative explorations in another, and such a re-writing might just as easily be directed against another post-colonial novel by a compatriot, not just in response to a European’s prejudiced depictions. And cumulatively, we have attempted to show in these three chapters, is thereby created a spectrum of thoroughly ‘worlded’ existential inquiry that proves to have engaged flexibly with various histories, trajectories, agents, and themes that comprise national becomings, as well as embodied diverse theoretical and historiographic versions and disagreements, and ‘meta-fictional’/hermeneutic problematics in performance within the same narratives.

Rather than any essentialist casting of either the post-colonial novel’s narrative modes or its thematic preoccupations, it is fiction’s implicit formal capacity to embrace re-inscription, narrative experiment and a potentially unlimited range of thematic inquiry, that allows it its unique openness to different aspects of a society’s fullness. In the next section we extend our study to discussing how such capacities have been utilised in the portrayal of a range of issues exploring the inhabitation of post-colonial nations by their women. But for now, we conclude by returning to the disagreement with which we began this section, with Anderson and Said about the irreducibly dialogic nature of the novel. If all the post-colonial novel did was to adapt a Western discursive form to reinforce coercively the mythologies and rationalisations of a borrowed nation-state paradigm--- which would be the implication of their arguments--- it would only turn itself into a doubly “derivative discourse”, to borrow Partha Chatterjee’s phrasing. This is the contention we have begun to refute by means of our ‘novelistic criticism’, and will continue to do in this study.

Section 3: Women, Narratives, and the Post-Colonial Nation.

Introduction: Proposing a Model of Feminist Historiography.

In an essay on 'Nationalism, Gender and Identity', R. Radhakrishnan considers the implications of Partha Chatterjee's argument regarding the conjuncture of Indian nationalism and women's politics during the colonial period, in which Chatterjee asserts:

The 'women's question' was a central issue in some of the most controversial debates over social reform in early and mid-nineteenth-century Bengal [...]. [But] what has perplexed historians is the rather sudden disappearance of such issues from the agenda of public debate towards the close of the century. From then onwards, questions regarding the position of women in society do not arouse the same degree of passion and acrimony as they did only a few decades before. The overwhelming issues are now directly political ones--- concerning the politics of nationalism (1993, 116).

Radhakrishnan presents and debates the numerous ramifications that arise out of such displacement "of 'one' politics in terms of an 'other'" (Castle, 2001, 192), especially when, as Chatterjee points out, "the [prevailing] hypothesis of critical social history today is that nationalism could not have resolved these issues; rather, the relation between nationalism and the women's question must have been problematical" (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 234):

Why is it that the advent of the politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women's politics? Why does the politics of the 'one' typically overwhelm the politics of the 'other'? Why could the two not be co-ordinated within an equal and dialogic relationship of mutual accountability? What factors constitute the normative criteria by which a question or issue is deemed 'political'? Why is it that nationalism achieves the ideological effect of an inclusive and putatively macropolitical discourse, whereas the women's question--- unable to achieve its own autonomous macropolitical identity--- remains ghettoised within its specific and regional space? In other words, by what natural or ideological imperative or historical exigency does the politics of nationalism become the binding and overarching umbrella that subsumes other and different political temporalities (Castle, 2001, 191).

Radhakrishnan goes on not only to challenge the 'colonising' displacement of one mode of discourse and activism by the priorities of another, but also to formulate an alternative envisioning of all discursive limits and horizons:

The questions that I've raised lead to still others, which will be posed here in all their political and epistemological generality. [...] How is a genuinely representative national consciousness [...] to be spoken for by feminism and vice versa? Is it inevitable that one of these politics must form the horizon for the other, or is it possible that the very notion of a containing horizon is quite beside the point? Can any horizon be 'pre-given' in such an absolute and transcendent way? Isn't the very notion of the horizon open to perennial political negotiation? [...] In other words, isn't the so-called horizon itself the shifting expression of equilibrium among the many forces that constitute and operate the horizon: gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and so on? If one specific politics is to achieve a general significance, it would seem that it has to possess a multiple valence, that is, enjoy political legitimacy as a specific constituency and simultaneously make a difference in the integrated political or cultural sphere. Without such access to an integrated cultural politics, any single subject-positional politics risks losing its interventionary power within that total field (2001, 192).

Both dissatisfied with and curious about the historical processes and discursive/interpretative preferences that lead to nationalist subsuming, Radhakrishnan turns to Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid for their outlining of a model of "feminist historiography", that would ontologically orient itself precisely towards interrogating these processes and simultaneously re-integrating diverse perspectives "without at the same time resorting to another kind of totalising umbrella" (2001, 192):

Historiography may be feminist without being, exclusively, women's history. Such a historiography acknowledges that each aspect of reality is gendered, and is thus involved in questioning all that we think we know, in a sustained examination of analytical and epistemological apparatus, and in a dismantling of the ideological presuppositions of so-called gender-neutral methodologies. A feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole and discards the idea of women as something to be framed by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by the wide set of social relations [and] in this sense, [...] is a choice open to all historians. Not as a choice among competing perspectives, or even as one among personal predilections [...]. Nor is the issue here the tokenist inclusion of women or the numerical or even qualitative evaluation of their participation in this or that movement. Rather as a choice which cannot but undergird *any* attempt at a historical reconstruction which undertakes to demonstrate our sociality in the *full* sense (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 3).

It is in such a spirit that we shall read the novels of this chapter, claiming that their distinctive means of social and national examination actually perform the re-inscriptive modes of multivalent narrativising such as Vaid and Sangari envision. We have argued throughout this study that (reading and writing) novelistic narrative inevitably "not only involves knowledge of and working at the interface of various disciplines, but also

[implicitly] a simultaneous questioning of the histories and assumptions of those disciplines” (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 3). Here we extend these contentions to claiming that the novelistic activity “of understanding our construction as agents and subjects of social processes [might] itself [work as] a kind of intervention in the creation of exclusive knowledge systems” (1993, 3), in the ways that Sangari and Vaid wish to perform against nationalist discourses which subsume other histories and voices. Further, we intend to demonstrate that novels are uniquely able to evoke the various potential interpretative implications that Radhakrishnan draws from the ‘feminist historiography’ project:

[It] boldly and relevantly raises questions concerning the ‘full’ and ‘total’ rethinking of historiography as such. [...] The very openness of the ‘choice’ (that of ‘feminising’ all historiography) is conceptualised as a form of historical and political inevitability. For the choice is not just any choice, but a choice that cannot but be made. In repudiating the very notion of gender neutrality, they integrate the category of gender into every aspect of reality; and in opening gender out to all historians, they make it impossible for other historians (who, for example, historicise along axes of nationality, class, race, and so on) not to integrate the feminist imperative within their respective projects. [...] As I have suggested, the strategy of locating any one politics within another is as inappropriate as it is coercive. [...] Nationalist totality, we have seen, is an example of a ‘bad totality’, and feminist historiography secedes from that structure not to set up a different and oppositional form of totality, but to establish a different relationship to totality. My objective here [...] is to suggest both that no one discourse or historiography has the ethico-political legitimacy to represent the totality, and that the concept of ‘totality’ should be understood not as a pre-given horizon but as the necessary and inevitable ‘effect’ or function of the many relational dialogues, contestations, and asymmetries among the many positions (and their particular-universal ideologies) that constitute the total field (Castle, 2001, 193-194).

With the ambitions of such a methodology before us, our discursive means in this section will once again operate through presenting a spectrum of existential possibility as narrated in the novels we will examine. Over the course of its two chapters, we move from considering various implications of women inhabiting a restrictive (but emphatically not presented as ahistorical or static) domesticity, as uncovered by writers ranging from Vikram Seth (1994) to Rushdie (1984) and Armah (1987), to examining the possibilities of moving beyond such boundaries in works by Anita Desai (1977), Arundhati Roy (1998), and Rohinton Mistry (1996). The final section of the second

chapter will consider novels by Gordimer (1980), Achebe (1988) and Buchi Emecheta (1994) to explore the performances of feminine agency and self-enunciation by their central characters, both individually and collectively, but without the pre-defined premises, definitions or restrictions imposed by the domains of home and family. We will conclude with a study of similar themes in a novel by Bessie Head (1987), where the focus has shifted to exploring such possibilities as fashioned by a rural subaltern woman. Our aim throughout will be to understand the extent to which the female characters (and the novelists) envision and enact heterogeneously premised and directed conceptions of their particular worlds and the multifarious histories they comprise, as well as the degree of influence upon them of the history, structures, and discourses of their societies and nation-states. In reading for the possibilities of feminine self-performance in such worlds, we would of course simultaneously be exploring the diverse possibilities such narrative trajectories perform of communication and community, and the transformations wrought on various social levels by such performances.

Chapter 6: The Implications of Domesticity.

A Suitable Boy: Feminine Domesticity and its Creative Conservatism.

In another context in the next section, we argue that Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is rooted in the familial, both for its narrative themes and form as well as the fundamental premise of its world-vision. For some women characters of the older generation, Mrs Rupa Mehra, Mrs Mahesh Kapoor and others, it appears as though their family forms the entire content of their identities and their worlds, and that they are indistinguishably dissolved in the 'greater' purpose of preserving the family's continuity and harmony. Seth appears to perform, and affirm, what Partha Chatterjee posits as the nineteenth-century nationalist resolution of the dichotomies of Indian identity within a colonial state. If Indian nationalists argued that "not only was it not desirable to imitate the West in anything other than the material aspects of life, it was not even necessary to do so, because in the spiritual domain the East was superior to the West" (1993, 121), then Chatterjee presents the corollary implication of such a position for the 'women's question':

Applying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social space into [...] the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests [...]. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world--- and woman is its representation. And so we get an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space (120).

Further, Chatterjee goes on to caution that, when seen from a nineteenth-century nationalist perspective, it would be "a grave error" (for us today) to interpret such a conception "as 'conservatism', a mere defence of "traditional' norms" or a "total rejection of the West" (121):

The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But, the nationalists asserted, it had failed to colonise the inner, essential identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture. Here the East

was undominated, sovereign, master of its own fate. [...] No encroachment by the coloniser must be allowed in that inner sanctum [...].

Once we match this new meaning of the home/world dichotomy with the identification of social roles by gender, we get the ideological framework within which nationalism answered the women's question. [...] The nationalist paradigm in fact supplied an ideological principle of *selection*. It was not a dismissal of modernity; the attempt was rather to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project (121).

For the most part, Seth's spectrum of female portraits (set nearly a century after Chatterjee's period of anti-colonial nationalism) affirmatively recognises an entire range of conservative containment as well as the potential for creative continuity within feminine domesticity. Further, as Seth demonstrates through the choices of Lata and Savita, it is not merely an anachronistic legacy that will fade away with the dawning of a reformed, post-independence, feminist, modernist or individualist outlook. Lata, whom unreasonable passion always makes uneasy (because it might require expressing potentially disharmonious individualism), devises a formula for happiness from her observations of Savita. In her marriage to Pran they recognise "limits and possibilities":

Their yearning did not stretch beyond their reach. They loved each other---or rather had come to do so. They both assumed without ever needing to state it---or perhaps without even thinking explicitly about it---that marriage and children were a great good (1994, 952).

At Pran's bedside in the same hospital where in another room Savita has just had their baby, Lata comes to feel that "with life and death so near each other here in the hospital, [...] all that provided continuity in the world or protection from it was the family" (952). In this light her mother appears to Lata for a moment as a "domestic goddess" (952), and she no longer resents Mrs Mehra's arbitrations on everything 'suitable' to Lata's life. Again, Seth appears to affirm a century later what Chatterjee terms the "characteristic nationalist answer" to the 'women's question' that lies in redefining "the natural and social principles which provide the basis for the 'feminine' virtues" (1993, 125).¹ And by reconfirming its validity for the educated and

independent-minded women of a younger generation, Seth, like Chatterjee's nineteenth century nationalists, also presents such domesticised femininity as neither a regressive nor a conservative conception. Chatterjee presents his version of the nationalist resolution:

The 'new' woman defined in this way was subjected to a *new* patriarchy. In fact, the social order connecting the home and the world in which nationalism placed the new woman was contrasted not only with that of modern Western society: it was explicitly distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition (127) [...]. It is this particular nationalist construction of reform as a project of both emancipation and self-emancipation of women (and hence a project in which both men and women had to participate) that also explains why the early generation of educated women themselves so keenly propagated the nationalist idea of the 'new woman' (129). [...] Once the essential femininity of women was fixed in terms of certain culturally visible spiritual qualities, they could go to schools, travel in public conveyances, watch public entertainment programmes, and in time even take up employment outside the home. [...] The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new, yet entirely legitimate, subordination (130).

The Consequences of Repression: *A Suitable Boy* and *Shame*.

But there is more to Seth's envisionings of the limits and implications of domesticity than his cross-generational endorsements of its capacity to forge a creative, continuous, and yet conservative "thread of love" (1994, 1458), even if his narrative emphasises this particular theme. Even though *A Suitable Boy* demonstrates exactly such distinctive separation between 'domains' enacted in a post-independence setting by most of its characters, one significant consequence of such separation that Seth's narrative makes evident repeatedly is how often these women remain unknown to the men around whom they have fashioned their lives--- husbands and sons who are able to take on their duties in the dynamic, 'material' world outside only because they are certain of this reliably stable feminine presence at home. We even encounter a fictionalised prime minister (Nehru) who is portrayed as never having made any effort to know his wife.

¹ For a fuller discussion of the nationalist agenda (and its limits and prescriptions) on the 'women's question' in nineteenth-century India, as well as diverse voices and testimonies from women of the

Such acknowledged instances of ignorance, incomprehension and isolation at the heart of the 'familiar-familial' recur frequently as undeveloped traces throughout the narrative's margins. The lifelong nation-builder of impeccable political integrity, Mr Mahesh Kapoor, is described by the omniscient narrator after his wife's passing as "a poor, ignorant, grieving fool" (1332), who deserves to suffer all his regret: "too late, and perhaps because of the love everybody else round him so clearly bore her, he began to realise fully what he had lost, indeed, whom he had lost--- and how suddenly" (1337). As he looks around at the funeral gathering after she has disappeared on the pyre, he notices the evidence of her legacy everywhere:

She was the garden at Prem Nivas [...], she was Veena's love of music, Pran's asthma, Maan's generosity, the survival of some refugees four years ago, the neem leaves that would preserve quilts stored in the great zinc trunks of Prem Nivas, the moulting feather of some pond-heron, a small unringed brass bell, the memory of decency in an indecent time, the temperament of Bhaskar's great grand-children (1332).

There are many such absences at the heart of Seth's immensely conceived world, women apparently deeply stable whose very life-performances cover over any ruptures in the family fabric (as well as providing the material in which the ruptures appear). Also, the neglect (or benevolent domination) by husbands of their spouses is not always idiosyncratically harmless. Professor Durrani is so affectionately absent-minded that he never realises the implications of his ignorance, but in this particular instance (which the narrator mentions but never develops in a separate scene, as per his usual practice), their lack of communication possibly drove his wife insane so that she is kept in a dark locked room at her sister's, visited by her two sons each week though never by her husband. In another incident, only Lata, after her encounter with Mr Sahgal in the middle of the night, comes to understand the extreme tension at the breakfast table as originating in an ongoing, recognised but unmentionable history of domestic abuse.

Shame advances such interrogation much further by fore-grounding the complex of various possible relationships between home and the wider world in post-independence Pakistan--- and exploring some of the multiple, dynamic consequences of inhabiting the paces and processes of two worlds simultaneously, especially for women with nation-builders for spouses and fathers.

Rushdie devotes as much of his narrative to the women who never leave their houses as he does to the stories of Raza, Iskander Harappa and Omar Khayyam, their husbands struggling with each other to direct and dominate the new nation. The novel is Seth-like in the way that it is spread out over an entire cast composed of inter-related families. The other similarity between the novels is that both contain a whole spectrum of domestic possibility and crises, but this is where any valid resemblance ceases. Rushdie never affirms domestic conservatism as being replete with its own imperturbable vitality in the way Seth does: for him, as for Arundhati Roy, domesticity is only an apparently 'inviolable' or 'timeless' disguise in which historical upheavals and social violations descend. Rushdie also re-inscribes the narratives that Seth intimates only in his margins--- the locked-up mentally ill wife is released and re-centred in Sufiya Zinobia, as is the Sahgal home of domestic abuse that Seth visits for only a single scene--- thereby questioning the price of a domestic patriarchy that is premised upon and itself underlies a wider puritan-authoritarian nationalism:

Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes its women beneath the intolerable burdens of honour and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well. Contrariwise: dictators are always--- or at least in public, on other people's behalf--- puritanical. So it turns out that my 'male' and 'female' plots are the same story, after all (1984, 173).

The overarching thematic link in Rushdie's conception of homes and worlds (and the domains of 'masculine' and 'feminine') in Pakistan is 'shame', which is his term for the will towards Sethian domestic conservatism as well as the premise upon which its

builders hoped to erect Pakistan--- as an inviolable (Andersonian) solidarity under the unifying omniscience of a shared God:

Once upon a time there were two families, their destinies inseparable even by death. I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale [...]. But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories and comedies, obliging me [...] to see my 'male' plot refracted [...] through the prisms of its reverse and 'female' side (173).

In Rushdie's version of Pakistani history, diverse modes of 'shame'--- religious, moral, familial, sexual--- were meant to provide collectively both the guidance and the insulation, as well as secure the bases of self-definition, by which individuals, families, and the nation itself could conduct their course together in "broad, horizontal comradeship" amid the multi-directional dynamism of history. But 'shamelessness' is the term for Rushdie's critique of the violence and repression involved in the enforcement of such an ideal, at both familial and national levels:

Between shame and shamelessness lies the axis upon which we turn; meteorological conditions at both these poles are of the most extreme ferocious type. Shamelessness, shame: the roots of violence (116).

In the course of these two chapters, we explore various Rushdian characters embodying different reactions, implications, as well as trajectories of resistance to the limits of such repressive domesticity, but for now we focus on his delineation of some of the distorting consequences of absolute confinement.

After watching her father burn alive for his intransigence before the demands of history, Bilquis Hyder is reduced from being one of a generation of "ordinary decent respectable ladies [...] to whom nothing ever happens, to whom nothing is supposed to happen except marriage children death" (65), to being one of many who now had "this sort of strange story to tell" (65). For a while, "she stands in a gully, denuded by the suicide of her father" (64), before attaching herself to Major Raza to be the "wife of a hero with a great future" (64), which is a move intended to help her push the past away and secure herself against any further exposure to the violations of history.

Yet despite becoming the wife of a future dictator, for the rest of her life, “she took to pacing about, slamming and locking doors, [...] developed a horror of movement, and placed an embargo on the relocation of even the most trivial of household items” (68). Because though “for a long time, she [remained] suspicious of history ” (64), the very premise upon which Bilquis resurrects her dream of an inviolably stable domestic dominion is subverted again by history, in the form of her husband and the consequences of his desire to be his country’s sole ruler. The novel ends with Bilquis fleeing once more with her husband:

Her behaviour was that of a woman who has gone far enough already, too far, a woman who has ceased to believe in frontiers and whatever-might-lie-beyond. Bilquis was barricading herself against the outside world in the hope that it might go away (272).

A similar erosion-by-domestic-repression takes a different direction with Bilquis’s friend Rani, who is married to Raza’s rival autocrat and history-maker Iskander Harappa. Rani lives unvisited by Iskander, but she is regularly intimidated and her home looted whenever his political fortunes dip or an opponent decides to settle scores; and her name is mentioned every time new rumours break out about her husband’s political or sexual immorality. Yet it is Rani alone in the abandoned estate who weaves unillusionedly diverse aspects of his period in power across eighteen tapestries portraying the country’s becoming with her husband at its centre. “Locked in their trunk, they said unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear” (192); and she accomplishes all this despite her lifelong exile from both a ‘normal’ domesticity as well as history:

This was a great difference between her and Bilquis Hyder: both women had husbands who retreated from them into the enigmatic palaces of their destinies, but while Bilquis sank into eccentricity, not to say craziness, Rani had subsided into a sanity which made her a powerful, and later on a dangerous, human being (152).

But of course no one will ever see Rani’s tapestries, no matter how radical or visionary they are. Both history as well as daily social life in the novel’s Pakistan are separated and structured along distinct tiers:

For instance at the time of the pan-Islamic conference when Heads of State arrived from all over the globe, and they all brought their mothers along, so that all hell broke loose, because the mothers in the zenana wing embarked at once on a tooth-and-nail struggle for superiority, and they kept sending urgent messages to their sons, interrupting the conference's plenipotentiary sessions to complain about mortal insults received and honour besmirched (246).

Thus Rushdie depicts the location and the bounds of feminine expression as being always restricted--- all such energies and conflicts have to be confined within the sanctioned space of the *zenana*. Even though domestic and female narratives occupy as much space in his novel as do male transactions within the 'outer' domain of national history, he always demarcates the limits of the impact these women are able to have on the wider fate of 'their' society, however endowed with irrepressible personality they might be. Women are narratively centred without being allowed much wider historical/national centrality in Rushdie's version of Pakistan's becoming.

Confinement and Complicity: Armah, Seth, Roy.

Writing of wives and mothers in post-independence Accra, Armah explores further implications of this same theme--- confinement within a repressive domesticity. In both *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* it is the hero's wife and Baako's mother respectively who are their most disappointed critics and the harshest judges of their incorruptibility. Any sense of achievement and social worth in these women seems entirely premised upon (the lack of) material possessions, the "cargo-cult" standard they appear to have unquestioningly adopted from the society around them. Through them Armah portrays the possibility of feminine complicity with the values of the 'masculine' 'outer' world and its resulting dangers, especially in periods when such values are severely confused under the combined stresses of emerging from the colonial era, as well as coping with the transitions (and disappointments) that followed in the aftermath of independence.

Vikram Seth, in an analogously complex vein, portrays Begum Abida, the courageous sister-in-law of the Nawab who chooses not to follow her family into Pakistan (and purdah), and instead becomes a member of the State Assembly. The abiding irony of her situation is that she always argues vehemently against land reform and redistribution, thus upholding aspects of the very patriarchies that she has rejected in her personal life--- the semi-feudal structure of landlords and the caste system it generates and relies upon, with landless labourers at the very bottom. And in another instance, in the rural Kerala of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, even though her women characters--- Mammachi, Baby Kochamma--- are often the victims most vulnerable to violation domestically and socially with no "Locusts Stand I" even in their own homes or in the businesses they set up, they are also willing and convinced collaborators in the violation or repression of others including their own daughters and grand-children. More than being passive upholders like Armah's wives and mothers, some of Roy's female characters participate actively in the processes involved in "putting history right", thinking of their efforts as being part of "collecting [its] dues from those who broke its laws" and "inoculating a community against an outbreak" (1997, 308). Even though it remains men who commit the actual violence (that considers itself "history in live performance", the "impersonal" force of "an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it" (309)), Roy's conception of such patriarchal processes is more 'androgynous' in that they are enacted in the 'inner' and 'outer' domains of home and society simultaneously, and their standards are enforced actively even by women whose own lives have been repeatedly violated by similar repressions.

Complicating 'Patriarchy'.

In common with much recent feminist (and post-colonial-feminist) work, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias reject the 'notion of patriarchy' in itself as a "much too crude analytical instrument" (Yuval-Davis, 1997, 7). They argue that:

[Such an absolute notion] does not allow, for instance, for the fact that in most societies some women have power at least over some men as well as over other women. Nor does it take into account the fact that in concrete situations women's oppression is intermeshed in and articulated by other forms of social oppression and social divisions.

This is the reason why [...] [we] have rejected the notion of patriarchy as a distinct social system which is autonomous of other types of social systems such as capitalism and racism. Rather, we argued that women's oppression is endemic and integral to social relations with regard to the distribution of power and material resources in the society. Gender, ethnicity and class, although with different ontological bases and separate discourses, are intermeshed in each other and articulated by each other in concrete social relations. They cannot be seen as additive and no one of them can be prioritised abstractly. [...] Contrary to what the notion of patriarchy suggests, women are not just usually passive recipients and non-participants in the determination of gender relations. Probably most importantly, not all women are oppressed and/or subjugated in the same way or to the same extent, even within the same society at any specific moment (7-8).²

Sangari and Vaid draw out further implications of acknowledging the non-essentialist, non-universalist, (and sometimes) non-biologically determined subject-construction of gender along various simultaneous, heterogeneously-directed yet inter-related axes:

Women's studies and feminist movements feel impelled to construct a positive and inspirational history. The danger here is both of literalising and simplifying the 'model' woman as well as legitimising the way in which reform and nationalist movements took up the woman question. [...] Women may sometimes exceed or violate the prescriptions of a particular set of ideologies precisely because they are members of a dominant group. The national movement too constructs an inspirational model of the past, and if feminism is to be different, it must acknowledge the ideological and problematic significance of its own past. Instead of creating yet another grand tradition or a cumulative history of emancipation, [...] we need to be attentive to how the past enters differently into the consciousness of other historical periods and is further subdivided by a host of factors including gender, caste, and class (1993, 18).

² Again, Roy makes evident that for some of her characters simply being biologically male does not imply any special insurance against the violations of society. Despite his bold successes at extending the limits of his Paravan status, Velutha remains an 'untouchable' in the eyes of even his own father, and is physically broken by the legislators and enforcers of social restrictions to remind him of the price of transgression.

For a more comprehensive discussion of the critical imperative to recognise the complex constructedness of the social implications of 'gender' along various simultaneous axes, see Talpade Mohanty (1998, 255-277), Yuval-Davis (1997, 6-8), and Sangari and Vaid (1993, 1-26) among various others arguing such a case.

Acknowledging the possibility of active feminine 'collaboration' with patriarchal elements when we also consider their simultaneous implication within categories such as caste and class, constitutes a vital part of the novelistic investigation of differently-situated women who have in common their confinement within domesticity. It is impossible, for instance, to separate one part of Begum Abida's fullness from another in *A Suitable Boy*: her staunch defence of the privileges and values of the landlord class to which she belongs is part of the same subjectivity (and specifically-located historical agency) that refuses to follow most of her family to Pakistan, and successfully enters politics instead. All of this co-exists within the same irreducible being-in-her-world, and the novel can enact the inter-active expressions of the various contradictions that simultaneously construct her.

Locating the Home in History: Armah, Roy, Rushdie.

Further, such fictions dismantle the superficially conceived binaries drawn to separate the home and the world--- the mythologies of a timeless 'inner' domain governed by 'domestic goddesses' so beloved of certain models of nationalism. On the contrary, domesticity without the option of entering the 'outer' world is revealed to be far less insulated from history than such nationalists claim it to be: in fact, as Rushdie and Arundhati Roy demonstrate, the family home can often become its focused intensification, made all the more difficult to inhabit because the women are entirely vulnerable to the descent of historical upheavals without being freely able to resist them. The tighter the bind of repressive domesticity, the greater is the degree of vulnerability arising out of such an enforced passivity. Baako's blind grandmother Naana in Armah's *Fragments* embodies this agony of inhabiting a changing world whose currents she cannot enter, comprehend or influence. The novel opens and closes with two of her interior monologues: she is the only one shown to possess clear memories of a more 'whole' past in which one's various identities would have appeared

integrated rather than in mutual conflict. Yet Armah portrays the impossibility of retrieving such epochs (or such conceptions) by placing this memory within the unvoiced consciousness of a blind old woman whom not even her own family takes seriously:

I have lived too long. The elders I knew and those who came travelling with me, they are all on the other side, and I myself am lost here, a stranger unable to find a home in a town of strangers so huge it has finished sending me helpless the long way back to all the ignorance of childhood. [...] The larger meaning which lent sense to every small thing and every momentary happening years and years ago has shattered into a thousand and thirty senseless pieces. Things have passed which I have never seen whole, only broken and twisted against themselves. What remains of my days will be filled with more broken things (1987, 195-196).

And it is not as if Naana is serene at least in her silence: she is haunted at night by accusing ancestors, and by day sees only the evidence of damage and confusion in her grandson and her relatives. She is even led to doubt that the past was as 'whole' as she recalls it, and is only certain she will die alone, closing one by one the holes through which the world around enters her:

From the world and the life around me, nothing comes to me. My eyes are no longer windows through the wall of my flesh but a part of this blinding skin itself. Soon my ears too will be shut, and my soul within this body will be closed up, completely alone (195).

Far from the illusion of a timelessly inviolable, creatively conservative repository of national tradition, Armah reveals restrictive domesticity as being potentially one of the worst ways of being trapped in history, one of the most paralysing forms of the double-bind of being immersed within its changes and yet excluded from influencing it at the same time.

In *The God of Small Things*, the familiar and the familial similarly become barely disguised focal points for the upheavals of history. For Roy, domesticity is a domain within which the same "Love Laws" and timeless sanctities of caste and birth enforce themselves with as much violence as in the rest of society, until 'transgressing' selves are reduced by their own family and community to being just "[self]-shaped holes in

the universe” (1998, 188). By interpreting social (caste- and gender-based) oppression as entirely continuous with a context of domestic repression, like Rushdie she dissolves not only the binary of a home set apart from the world, but demonstrates that the violence of history does not necessarily come from somewhere distant (such as the nation-state and its structures and agencies); rather, it is often entirely local and specific. Also, as Sangari, Vaid, Yuval-Davis and numerous other critics argue, in Roy’s novel the implications and performance of individual roles within a society’s history emerge as simultaneous and always multivalent, as she shows how the apparently contradictory agendas of casteism, communism and Christianity unite in a shared reactionary outrage to uphold the same ‘timeless’ values, and how their sanctions are then enacted through the modern, public institutions of trade unions and the police as well as within the domain of the family, with men and women often collaborating in this restorative effort.

Related Exclusions: The Nation’s Women and its People.

Aijaz Ahmad criticises Rushdie’s novel in terms that subaltern historians would approvingly recognise, for creating a narrative supposedly encompassing the history of an entire society that nevertheless reads like “a sort of spiritual biography of the [...] elite” who lead (or fail to lead, in the case of *Shame*) ‘the people’ “from subjugation to freedom” (Guha & Spivak, 1988, 38). Ahmad argues that Rushdie’s novel, by focussing solely on “the experience of a decadent class” (1994, 138) and presenting the history of its “corruptions and criminalities” (138) “as the experience of a ‘country’” (140), excludes:

The dailiness of lives lived under oppression, and the human bonding--- of resistance, of decency, of innumerable heroisms, of both ordinary and extraordinary kinds--- which makes it possible for large numbers of people to look each other in the eye, without guilt, with affection and solidarity and humour, and makes life, even under oppression, endurable and frequently joyous (139).

Ahmad is right to point out the novel’s missing portraits of other levels and trajectories of social ‘fullness’. Rushdie’s exclusive focus on the ‘makers’ of State history implies

that he too is succumbing to the terms of that history and the distorting effects of its forces, that by their violence *appear* to deprive the majority of ordinary human beings of their agency and fullness, and reduce them to the status of passive victimhood. 'The people' make only two appearances in the text--- violated, passive and non-individuated on both occasions. To Ahmad, Rushdie's failure lies in not utilising any narrative space to re-inscribe such lives and agencies, not by creating unconvincing role models or impossible heroes of resistance, but merely by telling more stories. This could have been the novel's form of restorative resistance--- to 'resist' the reductiveness of official history by re-inscribing more histories,³ and performing thereby through its unique mode of 'narrative calculus' how human becoming and resistance on every level could be seen as influencing a society's history.

Ahmad also relates the social fullness missing in the novel to the fullness he finds missing in Rushdie's women. He reads these women as metonymically "standing in" for all the social strata missing in the novel--- ordinary people, workers, peasants, political militants--- and therefore being its only representations of the potential of the "oppressed" to be "oppositional". And here again Ahmad finds further evidence of Rushdie's social-imaginative vision being deficient. In all the spectrum of the novel's women, he traces one shared theme, "the frustration of erotic need, which drives some to frenzy and others to nullity" (1994, 144), and goes on to critique Rushdie's "overvalorising" of the erotic as determining their entire humanity. Ahmad finds missing in these female characters any depiction of how women "have *survived* against very heavy odds, and they have *produced* history":

Madness, sexual frenzy, nullity of being, fevers of the brain, have been by and large, very uncommon: the vast majority of women have consistently performed productive (and not only reproductive) labour; and like those men who also do

³ Of course we mean 'resist' only metaphorically rather than materially: we have no wish to exaggerate the 'actual' social influence of the novels we are studying in any way: such claims lie outside of our focus, beyond our research and our knowledge. This issue also emerges in our conclusion. But for a fuller critique of such valorisation of textuality, see Leela Gandhi's discussion of Jonathan White (1998, 156-161).

productive work, they have retained with society and history a relation that is essentially imaginative, visionary, communal and regenerative. Erotic need has been, for women as for men, often important, but only in rare cases is it the lone desire, outside loves and solidarities of other kinds: work, in any case, has been for the majority far more central. So [...] there is something fatally wrong with a novel in which virtually every woman is to be pitied, most are to be laughed at, some are to be feared, at least some of the time, but none may be understood in relation to those fundamental projects of survival and overcoming which are none other than the production of history itself (150-151).

Yet even if we concede the validity of most of Ahmad's reservations, it could still be maintained that Rushdie demonstrates many of his themes precisely through such exclusionary focusing. First, to an even greater extent than his Indian novels, his narrative is able to establish the misrule, and the limits, structural divides, and cognitive and material failures of various nationalist discourses as well as governing models, and therefore demonstrate the sheer distance between the nation's ruling classes and those they rule over. In *Shame*, ordinary Pakistanis of either sex are nowhere near central to the becomings forced upon their country by its leaders. Thus, building on Ahmad's critique while simultaneously departing from it, we propose that Rushdie achieves a double-edged deconstruction of nationalist discourse. He exposes the paltry fictionality of nationhood being a shared, collective project by demonstrating how removed most of its population (i.e. the nation's ordinary people *and* its women) are from any opportunity to direct its political development, even though both 'the people' and 'women' constitute such crucial tropes in nationalist rhetoric. Thus there is seen to be as little effective reality to such nationhood as there is to nationalism's glorification of womanhood.

Conclusion: Further Consequences of Cognitive Failures.

We have already encountered in the previous section (in the works of Rushdie and Achebe) various implications of "how nationalist ideology deploys the inner/outer split to achieve a false resolution of its identity" (Castle, 2001, 198). Writing about post-colonial India, both Chatterjee and Radhakrishnan make explicit connections relating

the interpretative and historical failures of nationalism and the nation-state on the 'women's question' to the question of the state fully representing the heterogeneity and specificities of its population. For Radhakrishnan, "the ideological disposition of nationalism towards its people or its masses is fraught with the same duplicity that characterises its attitude to the woman's question" (Castle, 2001, 200). Commenting on Chatterjee, he illuminates the consequences of such cognitive dichotomy:

The result is a fundamental rupture, a form of basic cognitive dissidence, a radical collapse of representation. Unable to produce its own history in response to its inner sense of identity, nationalist ideology sets up Woman as victim and goddess simultaneously. Woman becomes the allegorical name for a specific historical failure: the failure to coordinate the political or the ontological with the epistemological within an undivided agency (197-198).

And Chatterjee himself draws out what he sees as the actual historical consequences of such conceptual failures for the project of the nation-state:

The new patriarchy which nationalist discourse set up as a hegemonic construct culturally distinguished itself not only from the West but also from the mass of its own people. [...] This raises important questions regarding the issue of women's rights today. We are all aware that the forms and demands of the women's movement in the West are not generally applicable to India. This often leads us to slip back into a nationalist framework for resolving such problems. A critical historical understanding will show that this path will only bring us to the dead end which the nationalist resolution of the women's question has already reached. [...] A renewal of the struggle for the equality and freedom of women must [...] include within it a struggle against the false essentialisms of home/world, spiritual/material, feminine/masculine propagated by nationalist ideology (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 251-252).

With such a re-articulated discursive programme as Chatterjee outlines and its inbuilt cautions in mind, the second chapter comprising this section will consider some fictional treatments of the heterogeneous histories of feminine self-orientation, resistance, and agency, both individually and as part of different possibilities of community and solidarity--- at first against the context and confines of domesticity and then further out beyond such boundaries. Operating against the immense odds of such restriction and violation as this chapter has established, these novels also demonstrate how some instances of feminine agency can therefore only be partial or severely problematic. Rushdie himself acknowledges elements of Ahmad's critique within his

novel (even though he does not do enough to develop such an affirmation into narrative):

I hope that it goes without saying that not all women are crushed by any system, no matter how oppressive. It is commonly and, I believe, accurately said of Pakistan that her women are much more impressive than her men (1984, 173).

But in the very next line he cautions: “their chains, nevertheless, are no fictions. They exist. And they are getting heavier. If you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining. In the end, though, it all blows up in your face” (173).

It is with the implications of such a caveat before us--- twinned with his affirmation of the possibility of agency beyond the determinism of various repressions--- and yet refusing the concluding note of all-encompassing despair, that we proceed into the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Women's Agency and Resistance.

Resistance Against Social Hostility: Rushdie and Roy.

Through the three sisters of Nishapur, Rushdie dramatises in *Shame* the possibility of how an exclusively feminine dominion over an unwavering domesticity might itself be asserted as a basis for resistance against both the repressive norms of society as well as the undesired transformations wrought by history. In Nishapur, the three sisters live as one without husband or father, defended by a dumbwaiter fitted with long knives to discourage the world from entering. Within the domain of their home they raise their son together refusing him circumcision, religion, or the identity of his father (or even his actual mother). "Their closing of ranks was absolute" (19) on every issue: they share each symptom of pregnancy indistinguishably through to the moment of giving birth, bring Omar up without ever needing to go out into the city, and then repeat the process just as mysteriously two decades later. Yet their boundaries raise many questions: does inviolability only come at the price of complete insularity? Are they enacting a significant revolt that denies their society hegemony over them while simultaneously fashioning their own 'nation' and laws to inhabit (such as retaining independent control over their reproductive and child-rearing capacities), as well as achieving a uniquely intimate, feminine solidarity that dissolves the limits of separate bodies and consciousnesses between them? Or are they succumbing after all to reactionary principles of patriarchy: does their isolation confirm that it is impossible to freely inhabit their world as women and be autonomous selves at the same time--- that these must be mutually exclusive options? Also, after Omar effects his successful rebellion and is allowed to go to school, the indivisible sisterly unity seems to waver, and the narrator reports that "they were never properly reunited until they decided to repeat the act of motherhood" (40). Thus motherhood is affirmed as the most significant (shared and individual) expressive experience of womanhood, which is the primary functional role for women that most versions of patriarchal discourse

(including many nationalisms) reiterate. Yet the novel ends with Omar's return to Nishapur, bringing with him his father-in-law the fugitive President disguised in a burqah, whom his mother's nurse back to health only to murder him afterwards, thus avenging his killing of their second son. This event remains their only entry into history--- to avenge themselves triumphantly within their own terrain and on their own terms, before they disappear forever.

Also in many of these fictions, any manner of resistance to or redefinition of patriarchal norms, no matter what the particular means or location might be, invariably invites hostility and counter-violence from various quarters in society and even within the family. The last event in the history of Nishapur is its storming by the people of Q., when they breach its defences for the first time and overcome their awe to destroy every last item. Even though they are appalled by their own violence afterwards, it is obvious how much the city has always resented its impenetrability; its apparent exemption from the terms of society, with its domain of feminine rule presided over by the inviolable solidarity of the sisters and the unknowability underpinning that solidarity.

Within her village in *The God of Small Things*, Ammu faces the same levels of hostility both from the wider community as well as from her own family (including her mother and aunt). Her first offence was that she violated her ordained place in the world (and hence threw into disarray that world itself) by running away to marry someone outside the community, acting on the purely individualist spur of love. Her return after the failure of her marriage, even if eternally remorseful, might not have constituted enough atonement, but not only does she come back as irrepressible and irreverent as ever--- determined to love her fatherless twins "double" and absolutely unconcerned with how little credibility she has within her home and society--- she then commits her second crime in repeating her earlier transgression, but this time with a lower-caste Paravan in the village. Her misdemeanours leave everyone wondering "where she had learnt her

effrontery from", "because she had not had the kind of education or read the sorts of books, nor met the kinds of people, that might have influenced her to think the way she did" (1998, 180). It just proves, everybody concludes, that "she was just that sort of animal" (180).⁴

And even after those patriarchs (including policemen, communists, and family members) whose social responsibilities necessitate ensuring the restoration of these breaches of 'shame' have done the needful, Ammu refuses to be cowed and threatens to confess that she willingly participated in her 'crime'. This is the "unsafe edge" to her that no one can interpret or accept, her "unmixable mix" of "infinite tenderness" and her "reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (321). But Ammu has to endure policemen tapping her breasts "like mangoes" and dies anonymous and wrecked, her children lost to her forever. Even if Roy manages to portray through her an irrepressible capacity for autonomy, and the possibility of performing a selfhood that is not entirely reducible to the imposed terms of history or society no matter how immersed or violated one is, her end is as wretched as Moor's or Saleem Sinai's. The woman confronting her world fares no better than Rushdie's men: Ammu is remembered only by her twins with love, but it is a love that haunts them into paralysis, a loss they find impossible to build new lives around.

Resistance Against Self-Hatred: Rushdie and Desai.

Rushdie and Anita Desai also explore how it is not just social or external aggression that feminine resistance has to overcome: self-hatred can often be just as determining an implication of a lifetime influenced by repressive norms and definitions. In *Shame*, Arjumand, Iskander Harappa's only daughter, considers her mother responsible for

⁴ Of course the novels discuss such hostility as faced by women in post-colonial contexts, but in Chatterjee's accounts of nineteenth-century Indian nationalism and its treatments of the 'women's question', there are numerous instances of the hostility and criticism faced by those women who defy the ideals or step out of the roles and domains assigned them, from men as well as from other women. For a fuller discussion see Chatterjee (1993), Chapters 6 & 7.

giving birth to her as a woman and therefore hates her, because her sex prevents her from being able to fully embrace her only passion--- the shaping (and running) of her country's history alongside her father. Despite her lifelong preparation for such a role, during which she re-invents herself thoroughly according to her image of how such a (male) leader would have to be (which includes squeezing in her breasts and earning the title of "Virgin Ironpants" over the years, though her father had to make no such sacrifice of his sexuality to attain power), when she finally gets her opportunity, she perpetuates her father's misrule in every way and even places her mother under official house arrest for life.

Nanda Kaul's long-repressed epiphany on the last page of Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* seems to devalue the entire narrative that has come before it, when it is revealed to her (and to us) that all her bold actions might perhaps have been purely reactive. In the wake of Ila's murder her own life stands before her "as a lie", especially the "fabrication" she inhabits here in Carignano: "she did not live here alone by choice---she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing" (1977, 145). Her married life was spent lovelessly with a husband who had a lifelong mistress; her many children are "all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them" (145). Desai's narration makes explicit that there may be nothing positive at all to her retreat from that earlier period and her self-reinvention within a new world invented exactly to order, because her retreat might be reducible to terms of total defeat and failure.

Until we arrive at this final page, Nanda Kaul's journey appears a remarkable one, in which she manages to break free of the limits of self-definition imposed by her role within family and domesticity, and invents an identity out of isolation, a becoming performed beyond a pre-fabricated Being. It is as if one of the domestic doyens underpinning Vikram Seth's world suddenly withdraws from her position, reveals

herself to be intensely unhappy in her roles as wife and mother, and finds a cottage in the Himalayas to be alone forever after. Desai's unambiguous ending does Nanda a disservice by detracting from the depth and courage of her self-recreation, in suggesting it might all have been a falsehood and a confession of utter failure. She thus implies that no woman could wish to extricate herself from the limits of domesticity and re-define her identity as an active choice, which amounts to no more than a restatement of the essential vitality of existential conservatism that Vikram Seth endorses in his novel (according to which selves flourish best in the worlds pre-designated for them, and only failures such as Rasheed could long for something different).

The Feminine as Scapegoat: Aurora, Saeeda and Sufiya Zinobia.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, despite his narrative demonstration that nations, selves, and families mutually destroy each other because human becomings on various levels combine to create an unsustainably contradictory and irresistibly violent existential environment, Moor still succumbs to the temptation of positing a prime cause (or a primal force) behind his vision of universal catastrophe. Predictably enough, though he is an unorthodox nationalist in almost every other aspect of his narrative, for this purpose he chooses Aurora. "Motherness", Moor "underlines the point--- is a big idea in India, maybe our biggest: the land as mother, the mother as land, as the firm ground beneath our feet" (1995, 137). But if it is "Mother India, with her garishness and her inexhaustible motion, [...] who loved and betrayed and ate and destroyed and again loved her children, and with whom the children's passionate conjoining and eternal quarrel stretched long beyond the grave" (60-61), his mother Aurora, through an unjustified merging of tropes, comes to represent the nation's history in all these aspects. She becomes the "too bright" star who blinds if looked at directly, and "her bending of other people's light, her gravitational pull which denied all hope of escape, the decayed orbits of those too weak to withstand her, who fell towards her sun and its consuming fires" (136), is what leads to conflicts between her children and her various

(suspected but never proven) lovers, that culminate in the destruction of the entire city. Together Aurora and his lover Uma become (for Moor) the twin embodiments of the nation's "polymorphous power of the perverse" (124). Of course, there is much more to Rushdie's characterising of Aurora than such scapegoating alone, but it is one of the novel's most prominent analogies. And besides, it is revealing in itself--- of the contradictions within masculine nationalism--- that while he is compelled to acknowledge Aurora's irrepressible capacity for autonomous self-definition, creativity and action, Moor considers those same qualities responsible for devastation on so many levels, from the familial to the national, as if homes, families and entire cities inevitably collapse violently whenever wives and mothers fail to be reliable, predictable and passive.

Another instance of such scapegoating occurs with Saeeda Bai, the courtesan in *A Suitable Boy*, who is presented as the living archive of much illicit knowledge about fathers and sons of the 'best' families in Brahmpur, because her home has been the locus of all the illegitimate masculine desire and activity outside the limits of what domesticity can ever validate or contain. Saeeda's silence thus constitutes as important a basis (and a shield) upon which familial respectability is premised as do the wives and mothers of Seth's narrative. Yet despite her best efforts to contain such dangerous knowledge and protect her daughter from its implications, even though it means lying about her father's identity, Saeeda's world collapses not from any indiscretion on her part, but because the family men involved unwittingly unlock secrets she has kept sealed for decades, thus exposing the 'shame' of each other. But even after the families have come together to erase any stain upon their official worldly honour, Saeeda by collective agreement is cast out forever. She is forced to become a repository of responsibility that no one else will claim while a mutually co-operative and beneficial cleansing of various family names is enacted; a fetish upon which to project everyone's shared guilt and shame which can then be buried so that affirmative renewals of

domesticity can proceed under conditions of recovered innocence. Saeeda thus becomes another marginalised absence forming the unspoken basis of Seth's cheerful conception of a conservative social wholeness that always takes for granted the infinitely enduring preservative powers of its women, and depends entirely on the assumption that women within or outside the family will expand or contract themselves with absolute, unquestioning elasticity to suit the roles they are expected to perform, without collapse or resistance.

In *Shame*, Bilquis' father Mahmud, himself nicknamed 'the Woman' for his implacable religious tolerance, a designation the import of which is to be interpreted as "Mahmoud the Weakling, the Shameful, the Fool" (1984, 62) says of the word 'woman': "what a term! Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word" (62)? Through his portrayal of Sufiya Zinobia, Rushdie performs the possibility of fetishising and scapegoating the feminine on a national scale, where she enacts (or has enacted through her) the perversion of nationalist discourses and ideals into their absolute opposites.

In an article that develops Gayatri Spivak's well known exposition of the historiographic crises that accompany any attempted 'recovery' of subaltern voices or agencies, Lata Mani re-examines the colonial-era accounts of sati in India, written from the perspectives of British administrators and Indians (both conservatives as well as would-be social reformers). She finds that the interpretative horizon all such discourses have in common is that "tradition [...] is posited as a timeless and structuring principle of Indian society enacted in the everyday lives of indigenous people. 'Tradition', interchangeable for the most part with 'religion' and 'culture', is designated as a sphere distinct from material life" (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 116). Mani goes on to evaluate the implications of such a casting:

Firstly, it produces analyses of sati in purely 'cultural' terms that empty it of both history and politics. Secondly, this notion of culture effectively erases the

agency of those involved in such practices. [...] [The widow] is consistently portrayed as either a heroine [...] or an abject victim [...]. These poles, 'heroine' and 'victim', preclude the possibility of a complex female subjectivity. [...] This representation of the widow makes her particularly susceptible to discourses of salvation, whether these are articulated by officials or the indigenous elite. [...] We can concede then, that women are not subjects in this discourse. Not only is precious little heard from them, but [...] they are denied any agency. This does not however imply that women are the objects of this discourse; that this discourse is *about* them. On the contrary, I would argue that women are neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on sati. For [...] analysis of the arguments of participants very quickly indicates that women themselves are marginal to the debate. Instead, the question of women's status in Indian society posed by the prevalence of widow burning becomes the occasion for struggle over the divergent priorities of officials and the indigenous male elite (117-118).⁵

To relocate to Rushdie's portrait of post-independence Pakistan, the narrative of Sufiya Zinobia allows him to investigate the implications of such repressive silencing (exerted to the point that she barely speaks throughout the novel). While recognising the exclusions that Aijaz Ahmad criticises the novel for, we present Rushdie as performing aspects of Gayatri Spivak's formulations of the problems involved in retracing and representing subaltern "effacement", thus opening up an alternative interpretative perspective within which to frame the narrative's imaginative limits. By denying us access to the "testimony of [Sufiya's or 'the people's'] voice consciousness" (Williams and Chrisman, 1993, 93), perhaps Rushdie is acknowledging through his narrating itself that within the conditions of certain histories "there [remains] no itinerary we can trace" of the subaltern subject (98). Borrowing and adapting from Pierre Macherey, Spivak challengingly redefines the limits of historiographic intervention ('on behalf' of the subaltern hitherto effaced from history):

What is important in a work is what it does not say. [...] A method might be built on it [...]. What the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence. [...] This can be a description of 'investigating, identifying, and measuring... the *deviation* from an ideal that is irreducibly differential'.

⁵ The same line of argument leads Spivak to her well-known formulation: "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (Mongia, 1993, 93). For further discussion of the politics of such representations of sati and female immolation, see both Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Mongia, 1993, 66-111) and Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan's article on 'Representing Sati...' (Castle, 2001, 167-189).

When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important. [...] The sender [...] is marked only as a pointer to an irretrievable consciousness. The historian, transforming 'insurgency' into 'text for knowledge', is only one 'receiver' of any collectively intended social act. With no possibility of nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamour of his or her own consciousness (or consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary training [...]). The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. [...] Subaltern historiography must confront the impossibility of such gestures (81-82).

Also, if, as Mani argues, "at a symbolic level, the fate of women and the fate of the emerging nation become inextricably intertwined" (Sangari and Vaid, 1993, 118), and yet "women in fact" are reduced to being merely "the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated" (118), Sufiya's silence (and her eventual course of expression) allows Rushdie to examine the complex of relationships between the claims of nationalist mythology and the actual unfolding of social history. For much of the novel, Sufiya is presented as little else besides the symbolic embodiment of 'pure shame'. Then the narrative develops to portray her as the eventual perversion of such a principle, the misbegotten consequence of an ideal of (religious, social, familial, and feminine) purity inhabiting an entirely 'impure' environment. The narrator informs us that he conceived of her as "pure" because he "couldn't think of another way of creating purity in what is supposed to be the Land of the Pure" (120). Even though he confesses that embodying shame by using an "idiot" to stand for "innocence" "might seem too romantic a use to make of mental disability" (121),⁶ Sufiya is Rushdie's image of the destruction (or the exposure) by history and social actuality of all abstractions imposed upon them, as well as the counter-violence that follows in return: she stands for all the abused nationalist, religious and moral principles upon which the nation was supposed to be based, and which were supposed to direct its becomings.

⁶ It is nevertheless a tradition that includes at least novels such as Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, though in both these cases the characters in question are male.

Her first blushes occur as a newborn long before she could have consciously known the sensation of shame, when her parents refuse to see the daughter before them blinded by their desperation for a son. From this earliest blush at her essence being thrown in doubt arises a stream of future occasions as she grows up “parched for lack of affection” (121)--- “her parents’ burden, her mother’s shame”--- until she cannot help “blushing uncontrollably whenever her presence in the world [is] noticed by others” (122). But the narrator would have us believe that Sufiya blushes also “for the world” (122), that she is the helpless barometer of all her society’s “unfelt shame”, a “janitor of the unseen”: accumulating within herself the shamelessness of the “lies, loose living, disrespect to one’s elders, failure to love one’s national flag, incorrect voting at elections, over-eating, extramarital sex, autobiographical novels, cheating at cards, maltreatment of women folk, examination failures [and] smuggling” rampant in Pakistan (122). Yet if Sufiya is intended to be the “broad-backed”, infinitely elastic embodiment of womanhood (and the upholder of the essential(ist) nationalist principles associated with such a conception), her mental age and her “innocence” ensure that she has not the barest defences of selfhood to keep the world from invading her unchecked. Thus, for her there is no insulation from the actual “shamelessness” of history, not even at home, where her father is the country’s dictator, responsible for so many distortions of the nation’s founding principles.

As powerless about her shame and its effects upon her as she is about its causes, Sufiya murders four adolescent boys, and her nation-wide rampage begins. For the only time in the narrative the ordinary people of the country are invoked and shown to be united, not by any moral or nationalist principles, but by terror-struck rumours of Sufiya. Yet she gradually evolves to become the people’s “champion” through the very act of slaying them brutally: “a rumour, a chimera, the collective fantasy of a stifled people, a dream born of their rage” (263), until she brings about her father’s downfall and herself explodes in the killing of her husband. Sufiya is Rushdie’s

enactment of femininity transformed from nationalist principle to what Anne McClintock would deem the nation's "fetish spectacle", the brutalised "champion" of a brutalised people. McClintock goes on to posit:

Nationalism inhabits the realm of fetishism. Despite the commitment of European nationalism to the idea of the nation-state as the embodiment of national progress, nationalism has been experienced and transmitted primarily through fetishism--- precisely the cultural form that the Enlightenment denigrated as the antithesis of reason. More often than not, nationalism takes place through the visible, ritual organisation of fetish objects [...] as well as through the organisation of collective fetish spectacle. [...] Far from being purely phallic icons, fetishes embody crises in social value, which are projected onto, and embodied in, what can be called impassioned objects. Considerable work remains to be done on the ways in which women consume, refuse, or negotiate the male fetish rituals of national spectacle (McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, 1998, 102).

As with another fetish we have examined (the feminine domain of inviolable domesticity in Nishapur that is performed to a logical extreme in Rushdie's portrayal of the three sisters), Sufiya's only entry into history is to murder. The pessimism of such a conclusion--- the implied "crises in social value"--- is impossible to ignore. Rushdie suggests that even if an excluded subjectivity were to be hypothetically resurrected and then allowed unchecked expression (including the opportunity for 'insurgency'), it would emerge so damaged from a lifetime of repression that it could only express itself (i.e. "consume, refuse, or negotiate the male fetish rituals of national spectacle") through violence against others equally (or more) vulnerable. Furthermore, if, as Ahmad does, we interpret the conditions endured by the novel's women as the metonymic representation of the repression suffered by the nation's people, their options of resistance in such a context are shown to be limited to the extremes of violated victimhood followed by retaliation through impassioned fits of murderous psychopathology.

Alternative 'National Families' in *A Fine Balance*.

Of course, not all African or Indian novels conclude so darkly about the possibilities of feminine resistance and agency, even if they explore in equally comprehensive detail the

conjunction of gender-based repression and the violence unleashed in the course of national history. In a different context, the next section investigates Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* as a study of selves abandoned (and continually violated) by the politics and 'progress' of the Indian nation-state, and the possibilities of survival and solidarity that emerge in consequence. At the heart of his narrative lies the almost utopian community of Indians entirely different in background from each other, who manage to come together for a year from combining their resistances to their conditions, survive despite their own doubts and against immense external odds, before being forced apart again by further violation. Yet the locus for this brief period is the flat of Dina Vakil, and her own prior decision to survive independently is what makes it possible. Dina takes on the challenge, after being widowed, of continuing not only as a lone woman in Bombay, but as a member of a small minority community for whom even a journey to the city's northern neighbourhoods is an unprecedented expedition. Mistry traces her hesitations about being alone as honestly as he describes her determination, and narrates all her initial doubts and prejudices about allowing Om and Ishvar into her flat as workers. Also, at the start she is shown to have no conception either of the lives they have known in their village (which included the burning alive of their entire family) or the ones they inhabit presently in the slums and streets of the city, and it is not until the middle of the novel that they trust her enough to tell her. But by then, she has allowed them to move in on a semi-permanent basis onto her verandah because they have nowhere but pavements to sleep on, and they cook and eat together. The middle-class Dina even attends the funeral of a friend of theirs, a limbless beggar whose funeral procession comprises one long march of the city's beggars. Even the rent-collector Ibrahim, the instrument through which her landlord threatens Dina with eviction, becomes in time a fatherly figure to her, as she sees his helpless implication within the nexus of mutual oppression that is often the only strategy left for survival among the city's subaltern classes. Dina, after suffering her brother's abuse and the absurdity of her husband's accident, decides to inhabit her existence along with all its adverse

circumstances, and confronts the imperative of self-reinvention without recourse to the pre-fashioned identities of remarriage or servile sisterhood that her brother offers. Yet in reinventing herself she also invents the basis for a unique form of 'imagined community' in her flat, opening herself and her home to Indians hitherto entirely unknown to her. Thus Mistry performs the possibility of a solidarity of diverse 'subalterns', and a 'national family' premised neither upon the norms of patriarchal domesticity nor facilitated by the history of the nation-state, even though it has to improvise continually against the pressures of both.

Minoo Moallem and Iain Boal theorise an analogous form of "oppositional agency" that is able to "recognise the full range of lived experience as the ground of practical struggle and solidarity":

Oppositional agency is not only intimately connected to a strategic politics that simultaneously resists the assimilationist and homogenising technologies of majority groups, but also struggles for more representative social institutions within and beyond the community. [It] could at least open up spaces in which identities, formed in the welter of political struggles, remain supple in repertoires, not frozen or cast in official moulds (Kaplan, Alarcon and Moallem, 1999, 259).

The conclusion of Mistry's novel finds Dina as the unpaid, unofficial maid in her brother's house, the fate she has resisted all her life. But such an 'end' does not by any means degrade her journey (unlike the ending to *Fire on the Mountain* that demeans Nanda Kaul in her own voice): Dina, and the 'family' she helped to fashion, still have recourse to a back door, through which every afternoon she serves Ishvar and Om lunch on her brother's nicest plates, and they share banter and humour, far more irrepressible than the odds allow, and closer than ever.

An Alternative 'Women's Time' Within National History: McClintock and Bhabha.

Within the identity-reclaiming, wholeness-restoring violent resistance that he considers an inevitable stage in the decolonising process (on a psychic level as much as the political; both individually and as a 'national' collective) (1985, 73-74), Fanon also envisions a significant role for the women of the colonised population.⁷ Yet it is here that Anne McClintock objects at various points to the assumptions and prescriptions underlying his characterisation of women's roles and their agency:

Theirs is a *designated* agency--- an agency by invitation only. Before the national uprising, women's agency was null, void, inert as the veil. Here Fanon not only colludes with the stereotype of women as bereft of historical motivation but also resorts, uncharacteristically, to a reproductive image of natural birthing: "it is an authentic birth in a pure state". [...] Female militancy, in short, is simply a passive offspring of male agency and the structural necessity of the war (McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, 1998, 98).

Such a conception continues to have implications in the aftermath of achieving independence (vis-à-vis the extent of attainment of women's, and thereby, actual widespread social liberation):

Women's liberation is credited entirely to national liberation, and it is only with nationalism that women 'enter into history'. Prior to nationalism, women have no history, no resistance, no independent agency. And since the national revolution automatically revolutionises the family, gender conflict naturally vanishes after the revolution.⁸ Feminist agency, then, is contained by and subordinated to national agency, and the heterosexual family is preserved as the 'truth' of society--- its organic authentic form. [...]

In the post-revolutionary period, moreover, the tenacity of the father's "unchallengeable and massive authority" is not raised as one of the 'pitfalls' of national consciousness. [...] Deeply reluctant as he is to see women's agency apart from national agency, Fanon does not foresee the degree to which the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) will seek to co-opt and control women, subordinating them unequivocally once the revolution is won (99).

⁷ For a fuller discussion see Fanon's essay 'Algeria Unveiled' (1967, 35-67).

⁸ Once again, for a thorough exposition of the long-term post-independence implications of characterising popular anti-colonial resistance as having been 'natural', 'automatic', and 'spontaneously revolutionary', see Neil Lazarus' critique of Fanon's 'messianism' in his book on Armah (1990), especially Chapter 2.

Yet McClintock also sees how the problems involved in such conceptualising are by no means particular to the instances of Algeria or Fanon:

All too frequently, male nationalists have condemned feminism as divisive, bidding women to hold their tongues until after the revolution. [...] [But this] serves merely as a strategic tactic to defer women's demands. Not only does it conceal the fact that nationalisms are from the outset constituted in gender power, but as the lessons of international history portend, women who are not empowered to organise during the struggle will not be empowered to organise after the struggle. If nationalism is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege (109).

Against the terms of such discourse, McClintock envisions an alternative "feminist investigation of national difference" that is comparable to Sangari and Vaid's conceptualisation of their project of 'feminist historiography':

[It] might, by contrast, take into account the dynamic social and historical contexts of national struggles; their strategic mobilising of popular forces; their myriad, varied trajectories; and their relation to other social institutions. We might do well to develop a more theoretically complex and strategically subtle genealogy of nationalisms (99).

Thinking along similar lines, Homi Bhabha refracts a discussion of Fanon's capacity to evoke the 'performative' national "zone of occult instability where the people dwell" in his writing through a reading of Julia Kristeva's conception of 'women's time', which to Bhabha constitutes a "powerful critique and redefinition of the nation as a space for the emergence of feminist political and psychic identifications" (1997, 153).⁹ Thus, if "the political effects of Kristeva's multiple women's time leads to what she calls the "demassification of difference" (153), while "Fanon's 'occult instability' signifies the people in a fluctuating movement *which they are just giving shape to*" (153), then Bhabha envisions the consequences of these conceptions being performed together:

[They would] seek to redefine the symbolic processes through which the social imaginary-- nation, culture or community--- becomes the subject of discourse, and the object of psychic identification. These feminist and postcolonial temporalities force us to rethink the sign of history *within* those languages, political or literary, which designate the people 'as one'. They challenge us to

⁹ For her own exposition, see Kristeva (1986, 187-213).

think the question of community and communication *without* the moment of transcendence: how do we understand such forms of social contradiction (153)?

And finally, such “a metonymic interruption in the representation of the people” (155) as Kristeva’s conception of ‘women’s time’ inserts also constitutes a further challenge to any potentially coercive Andersonian image of nations as ‘sociological solidities’ inhabiting ‘homogeneous, empty’ time:

The ‘singularity’ of woman--- her representation as fragmentation and drive--- produces a dissidence, and a distanciation, within the symbolic bond itself which demystifies the ‘community of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalises and equalises’. The minority does not simply confront the pedagogical, or powerful master-discourse with a contradictory or negating referent. [...] Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonises the implicit power to generalise, to produce the sociological solidity. The questioning of the supplement is not a repetitive rhetoric of the ‘end of society’ but a meditation on the disposition of space and time from which the narrative of the nation must *begin*. [...] Its force lies [...] in the renegotiation of those times, terms, and traditions through which we turn our uncertain, passing contemporaneity into the signs of history (155).

Such experiments in “renegotiation”, in which singular and irreducible conceptions of ‘women’s time’ are narratively performed whilst simultaneously immersed within and counterpointed to the ongoing histories of state and society, are what the novels and characters discussed in the next section of this chapter attempt.

Burger’s Daughter: ‘Non-Synchronous’, ‘Non-Punctual’ Self-Location in History.

Gordimer’s epigraph to *Burger’s Daughter* immediately foregrounds that this will be a narrative charting as yet unresolved becomings rather than affirming or reiterating a pre-defined identity: “I am the place in which something has happened”. The ‘I-site’ is Rosa’s, and it is far from being an uncomplicated, predictable Fanonian continuation of the revolutionary trajectory that her father’s friends would have expected, that would end with her being in prison ‘naturally’ because she is Lionel Burger’s daughter, part of a family known to be “totally united and dedicated to the struggle” (1980, 12). Gordimer reverses the polarities explored thus far in this chapter: it is no longer the

domain of the home where inherited patriarchal discourses are challenged and subverted. Throughout her childhood, Rosa has breathed in the activity, history, mythology and rhetoric of the struggle against apartheid as part of the everyday life of her home, but now she finds that she cannot step into 'her' role within the resistance community as readily as her father's comrades expect her to, because she has also always struggled against precisely that legacy and its limits:

When I was passive, in that cottage, [...] I was struggling with a monstrous resentment against the claim--- not of the Communist Party!--- of blood, shared genes, the semen from which I had issued and the body in which I had grown. [...] My mother is dead and there is only me, there, for him. Only me. My studies, my work, my love affairs, must fit in with the twice-monthly visits to the prison, for life, as long as he lives [...]. My professors, my employers, my men must accept this overruling. I have no passport because I am my father's daughter. People who associate with me must prepare to be suspect because I'm my father's daughter (62-63).

This constitutes Rosa's articulation of her refusal to accept unquestioningly the 'pedagogic', all-subsuming imposition of her role within someone else's schema of convictions as the limits defining her own life-choices, even if Lionel is her own father, even if she agrees with and admires him, and even if it implies for her the opportunity to participate in revolution *against* her society's history. Even if it appears the precise opposite of being restricted to the domain of the domestic, Rosa sees that she will continue always to be interpreted merely as 'Burger's daughter'. Lionel, in his time, found Marxism to be the ultimate interpretative and synthesising horizon within which to analyse apartheid: "this contradiction that split the very foundations of my life, that was making it impossible for me to see myself as a man among men, with all that implies of consciousness and responsibility--- in Marxism I found it was analysed in another way: as forces in conflict through economic laws" (25).¹⁰ Marxism, in Lionel's vision, allows him to engage beyond the limits of a superficial liberalism: he would have been the first to agree that there was nothing special to commemorate about his dying in prison, when thousands of blacks, revolutionary or otherwise, suffered the

¹⁰ For a fuller exposition of Lionel's Marxist convictions see Gordimer (1980, 25-26).

same fate anonymously. And yet Rosa continually emphasises that it was neither schooled ideology nor dogmatism that led Lionel down the path of such solidarity and resistance in the first place:

Lionel--- my mother and father--- people in that house, had a connection with blacks that was completely personal. In this way, their communism was the antithesis of anti-individualism. Their connection was something no other whites ever had in quite the same way. A connection without reservations on the part of blacks or whites. The political activities and attitudes of that house came from the inside outwards [...]. At last there was nothing between this skin and that. At last nothing between the white man's word and his deed; spluttering the same water together in the swimming pool, going to prison after the same indictment: it was a human conspiracy, above all other kinds (172).

Yet if "[her parents] had the connection because they believed it possible" (172), for Rosa, (even though she was part of that household throughout her childhood), it proves not to have been learned and inherited unproblematically. She realises that though she has known and mingled all her life with blacks in a variety of roles, she also remains irreducibly distant from their experiences in ways that merely espousing Lionel's beliefs will not alter. Rosa has lost the "connection", without ever ceasing to believe in the correctness of the convictions. She actually feels liberated on hearing of her father's death in custody:

Now you are free. The knowledge that my father was not there ever, any more, [...] suddenly it was something else. Now you are free.
I was afraid of it: a kind of discovery that makes one go dead-cold and wary.
What does one do with such knowledge (62)?

Her own enunciation of her self within her world is catalysed by the need to 'perform' autonomously either the recovery of such a 'connection' or the discovery of her own motivations. Besides, there is her resentment of the expectations that the white anti-apartheid movement and her own family impose upon her, and her reaction to the arrogance of a lover who dismisses her position as impossibly inauthentic. And it is because of this autonomously-premised self-performance that is neither "punctual" nor "synchronous" with any larger movements outside herself, that her situation as an under-trial in a South African prison at the end of the novel, despite its superficial resemblance to her father's fate, does not constitute evidence of her eventually playing

out her part within a (Fanonian) conception of a “pedagogic”, continuous, naturalised, and homogeneous solidarity with the revolutionary movement. Rosa’s trajectory remains singular; for most of the narrative she is “uncounselled and unable to counsel others”, and the novel exists therefore in the “contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living” (1997, 162) that Bhabha formulates as an alternative to Andersonian “sociological solidity”.

Gordimer painstakingly establishes Rosa’s efforts at self-relocation via three major landmarks in the narrative--- that cumulatively force her to question the limits of individual action when confronted with the universal certainty of mortality, as well as more specific appraisals of the socio-political implications of inhabiting her particular circumstances as a white woman in South Africa. The first such moment is the death of a man that goes almost unnoticed in a city park. This death to Rosa is the “mystery itself” (79), beyond accident or cause, historical progress or revolutionary emancipation. “Circumstantial causes are not the cause: we die because we live” (79). In a manner reminiscent of the absurdist futility evoked by Beckett’s plays and Meursault in Camus’ *The Outsider*, Rosa wonders if anything can actually be changed when such inevitability will remain unaffected:

The revolution we lived for in that house would change the lives of the blacks who left their hovels and compounds at four in the morning to swing picks, hold down jack-hammers and chant under the weight of girders [...]. It would change the days of the labourers who slept off their exhaustion on the grass like dead men, while the man died. [...] Black children--- it was promised--- would not have to live off the leavings we threw into the bin. [...] But the change from life to death--- what had all the certainties I had from my father to do with that? [...] I was left with that. It had been left out. Justice, equality, the brotherhood of man, human dignity--- but *it will still be there* (79-80).

Her second ‘epiphany’ is more socially and historically specific, even though it is just as despairing. After seeing a black man thrash his weary donkey, she feels unable to stop him or to complain about him because of the selective blindness that she would require to overlook his context in such a situation:

I could formulate everything they were, as the act I had witnessed; they would have their lives summed up for them officially at last by me, the white woman--- the final meaning of a day they had lived I had no knowledge of, a day of other appalling things, violence, disasters, urgencies, deprivations which suddenly would become, was nothing but what it had led up to: the man among them beating their donkey (209).

This second confrontation with the limits of her situation (that any conception of 'agency' or 'autonomy' would have to negotiate) is no less absolute than the first, and is moreover firmly located within the specific history of her society. It leads Rosa to realise that she does not know "at what point to intercede makes sense" any more: "I drove on because the horrible drunk was black, poor and brutalised. If somebody's going to be brought to account, I am accountable for him, to him, as he is for the donkey" (209-210). After feeling so completely implicated, she concludes that for the present she does not know "how to live in Lionel's country" (210).

But the love and tranquillity she discovers in Europe is destroyed in the space of one intemperate phone-call with her childhood playmate Baasie. More than resenting him for his hostile insistence on how inalienably distant their lives are (because of the fact of colour that could never be inter-personally overcome within the context of the society they come from), Rosa despises herself for the hurt that overcomes her on a personal level, because she also recognises that such hurt feelings have no basis and no future:

Repelled by him. Hating him so much! Wanting to be *loved*!--- how I disfigured myself. [...] To taunt him by reminding him that he is thousands of miles away from the bush where *I thought he might have died fighting*; I! To couple his kind of defection with mine, when back home he's a kaffir carrying a pass and even I could live the life of a white lady (329-330).

Rosa realises that the implications of her once-friend's colour, his orphanhood and his exile, the limits of his choices and the imperatives of his obligations can never be equated with hers within the immense imbalances of the world they inhabit, and by feeling rejected, she only confirms the roles that such a history has already pre-fashioned for them--- "him bitter; me guilty" (330).

Lionel's "heroism" came from the certainty in the work that needed to be done for the "Future". Rosa feels that she can never be a 'hero' in the same way, but what she comes to locate is a role within her society, that confronts the implications of being immersed in, and constructed by, its contradictions, which she can neither transcend nor evade by defecting:

Nothing can be avoided... No one can defect.
I don't know the ideology:
It's about suffering.
How to end suffering.
And it ends in suffering (332).

Yet such an absurdist affirmation is followed neither by a Beckettian all-dissolving despair nor any nihilistic action such as Meursault's killing in *The Outsider*. For Rosa to return to South Africa and take up work in an hospital is the only way to inhabit these contradictions, of the limits of mortality as much as the specific contradictions within her circumstances that in such a world will forever define and simultaneously undermine her 'agency'.

Resistance, Class, and the Re-Articulation of Community: Achebe, Emecheta, Head.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the President's secretary Beatrice comes to realise that those oblique inter-personal symbolic gestures that she has hitherto thought of as "acts of rebellion"--- "first to spurn a seat of honour and then to greet a mere driver first" (Achebe, 1988, 72), amount to no more than "puny, empty revolts, the rebellion of a mouse in a cage" (72) when considered against the context of the entrenched structural imbalances and abuses of power within the regime of which she remains a functioning agent, and the extent of political abandonment and material degradation suffered by the majority of the country's people. After an incident at a dinner-party thrown in honour of the President's European and American friends, she moves from feeling insulted on

a personal level to seeing herself as a symbol of her “ long-suffering people ” (81): “and *them* in the context was *me*. [...] Corny? So be it!” (79-80).

After realising the contradictions between her position within such an apparatus and her presumptuous, self-important mode of discontentment, for a while she adopts an attitude in which she excuses her own ‘complicity’ with the status quo by accepting her relegation to being a passive consumer of her society’s history, whose only priority is to survive it: she argues that she couldn’t “be blamed for the state of the world. [...] Scepticism is a girl’s number six [...]. You can’t blame her; she didn’t make her world so tough” (88). But such a state of mind does not last long, and besides she is compelled to reorder both her views as well as her entire life when the very structures within which she has housed herself are uprooted by the violence of the coup and the counter-violence that follows. Beatrice is affected so directly “that for weeks she sprawled in total devastation” (218). But where “in earlier times” she would have responded “by retreating completely into herself, [...] distrustful of the solace of [her] fellows” (218), now, like Dina Vakil in *A Fine Balance*, she finds that “the bloody events of November had thrown her into a defensive pact with a small band of near-strangers that was to prove stronger than kindred or mere friendship” (218). And she responds similarly, by creating a new domain that is not domestic in any predefined sense and cuts across class, ethnicity, and gender, and has been fashioned out of a solidarity born of surviving the severe upheavals of her society’s history: “in the weeks and months that followed, her flat became virtually the home of Emmanuel and Braimoh and the girl Adammah” (219). Further, Beatrice finds herself capable of returning “less and less timidly to relive aspects of the nightmare” and even of reassessing “her reflexes, feelings and thoughts” (218). Like Rosa Burger, she moves from a personal grief for the losses of Ikem and Chris to wondering analytically if such a fate was not historically predetermined, as part of the consequences of the distances and imbalances within the class and power-structures of their society:

The image of Chris as just another stranger who chanced upon death on the Great North Road or Ikem as an early victim of a waxing police state was no longer satisfactory. Were they not in fact trailed travellers whose journeys from start to finish had been carefully programmed in advance by an alienated history? If so, how many more doomed voyagers were already in transit or just setting out, faces fresh with illusions of duty-free travel and happy landings ahead of them (220)?

And even though she mourns the irrecoverable loss of them as friends and invaluable gifted individuals, and despite the continuing violence that never looks like it will be succeeded by any re-ordering of either society or government, Beatrice recognises that this remains a historical opportunity to reconstruct the nation on the basis of reconceived premises: their deaths, and the death of their once-comrade the dictator, could be turned into a lasting affirmation that “this world belongs to the people of the world, not to any little caucus, no matter how talented” (232).

Around the middle of the novel, Beatrice also forces her self-righteous, elitist friend Ikem to admit that his apparently radical rethinking of the ‘women’s question’ within the movement towards national liberation is in fact “unclear and reactionary” (96):

The way I see it is that giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed in not enough, [...] like the women in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated menfolk. It is not enough that woman should be the court of last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late (92)!

Further, she compels Ikem to concede that is not for him or other male nationalists belonging to the country’s elite classes, no matter how principled or visionary, to decide “what the new role for Woman will be” (98):

Thank you, BB. I owe that insight to you. [...] I don’t know. I should never have presumed to know. *You* have to tell us. We never asked you before (98).

But it would merely be the substitution of one mode of hegemonic presumption by another if such novels were not to recognise the distinct voices and histories implied by the differences of class, religion, socio-economic circumstances and ethnicity between women, and instead forwarded any single perspective such as Beatrice’s as being

legitimately representative of all the women in her society. In Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* Debbie Ogedembge, who has been raised within the same powerful nation-building class as Beatrice is forced by the Biafran war to undergo comparable upheavals--- an enforced self-'unclassing' because of which she has to attempt to overcome the boundaries of "her education, the imported division of class, [that] still stood in the way" (1994, 201). She has to flee into the bush along with several village women and their children, thereby meeting and working with people she has never encountered before in the most trying of situations:

Again Debbie marvelled at the resources of women. She had seen Uzoma Madako with her husband in Benin, seen the way she sat, her head resting passively [...]. And now look at the same woman, a few days after the death of her husband, she had the courage to slap another woman, to tell another woman to stop indulging in self-pity (203).

But these women are neither passively silent, nor are their opinions restricted to their roles as wives and mothers. If Nigerian history has exposed through its upheavals the superficiality of any distinction between an ahistorical, timeless domesticity governed by imperturbable 'domestic goddesses' and the dynamic, 'masculine' domain of national life, then the re-negotiations of these women's roles must inevitably include engagement with all the different aspects of their situation:

Because the men also gave us their name, [...] and in the process of letting your husband provide for you, you have become dumb and passive. Go back to being yourself now. If you are too lazy to farm, you may have to sell your body. But what is so new about that? Your children have to live (204).

When one of them wonders if death is preferable to continuing amid such conditions, the response by another woman is sharp and immediate:

Have you been dead before? How do you know all these people dying before their time are happy where they are? Our men! A few years ago it was 'Independence, freedom for you, freedom for me'. We were always in the background. Now that freedom has turned into freedom to kill each other, and our men have left us to bury them and bring up their children; and maybe by the time these ones grow up there will be another reason for them to start killing one another (204).

Again, in a manner similar to Rosa Burger, though spoken from a perspective situated entirely differently to hers, there is recognition both of the hollowness of (masculine) nationalist discourse, as well as the possibility that the very children they are raising might grow up to perpetuate the violence they are fleeing. But neither passive surrender nor nihilism is an option.

Bessie Head's *Maru*: 'Can the Subaltern Speak'?

Yet narrating evidence of such subaltern voices and their agency amid history is rarely treated by African and Indian novelists as unproblematically representable. In a manner comparable to Rushdie's portrayal of Sufiya Zinobia and to Coetzee's narrative of Michael K as discussed in the next section (though with clear differences in her narrative trajectory and its outcome), Bessie Head performs the difficulties and the limits--- of either achieving any undisrupted retrieval of 'subaltern' voices or of interpreting 'subaltern' historical agency--- that Spivak delineates as recognitions that should be integral to any attempts at subaltern historicising:

For the true subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. [...] The question becomes, How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? [...] To make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognised as having any moral, aesthetic, or historical value. It is the slippage from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual [...] that is consistently troublesome (Williams & Chrisman, 1993, 80-81).

In Head's novel *Maru*, Margaret's status is repeatedly and explicitly underlined, even as an adult teacher in a classroom full of children:

Children learnt it from their parents. Their parents spat on the ground as a member of a filthy, low nation passed by. Children went a little further. They spat on you. They pinched you. They danced a wild jiggle, with the tin cans rattling: 'Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard (1987, 10)! [...] Ask the scientists. Haven't they yet written a treatise on how Bushmen are an oddity of the human race, who are half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey? [...] Or else how can a tribe of people be called Bushmen or Masarwa? Masarwa is the

equivalent of 'nigger', a term of contempt which means, obliquely, a low, filthy nation (11-12).

Head also narrates the implications that inhabiting such a social position has for Margaret as a little girl, when she is both an orphan and a Masarwa:

There seemed to be a big hole in the child's mind between the time that she slowly became conscious of her life in the home of the missionaries and conscious of herself as a person. A big hole was there because, unlike other children, she was never able to say: 'I am this or that. My parents are this or that'. There was no one in later life who did not hesitate to tell her that she was a Bushman, mixed breed, half breed, low breed or bastard (15).

But what the narrative portrays increasingly in its development is that such a 'hole' is never left empty: instead, it becomes a 'ground' (as Mani, Spivak or Sundar-Rajan would put it) upon which various conflicts and experiments are conducted, with only some bearing any direct relevance to Margaret but each decisively altering the direction of her life. As with Rushdie's narration of Sufiya Zinobia, Head throws into crisis any simplistic conception of representing Margaret's "pure, retrievable consciousness" (Williams & Chrisman, 1993, 81), especially when as Spivak argues, "within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced" (82). On the contrary, the novel becomes a complex, self-reflexive performance of what we have seen Spivak define above as the intellectually 'interventionist' "task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged" (81). Through her narrating that confronts and pushes against the limits of such recognitions, Head re-positions her own role as the recorder of an inevitably interrupted history, as if despite her awareness of all the implied difficulties, the responsibility of attempting "representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish" (Williams & Chrisman, 1993, 104).

Even for her well-meaning foster mother, "a scientist in her heart with a lot of fond, pet theories" (Head, 1987, 15), whose intervention gives Margaret a home for the first time,

the child is sometimes seen as no more than “a real, living object for her experiment” (15): “who knew what wonder would be created” (15)? And even as an adult, Margaret remains the “ground”--- the pretext for conflict either as an instance of a despicable Masarwa or as an “abject victim” needing rescue--- upon which battles between the “divergent priorities” of various discursive and social positions are conducted, rather than an agent who is shown to possess a “complex female subjectivity” of her own. We might reiterate and adapt Mani’s formulation of the status of nineteenth-century Indian satis in the histories of the period:

We can concede then that women are not objects in this discourse. Not only is precious little heard from them, but [...] they are [also] denied any agency. This does not imply however that women are the objects of this discourse; that this discourse is *about* them. On the contrary, I would argue that women are neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse [...]. For [...] analysis of the arguments of participants very quickly indicates that women themselves are marginal to the debate (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 117).

In Head’s narrative, it is after all the eponymous Maru who is the truly active protagonist, and it is entirely through the performance of the struggle between his “visionary” longings and motives that Margaret’s fate is shown to be decided, rather than through any act of her own. Margaret is never more than the forever-unconsulted catalyst, and the means by which Maru enacts his unilateral decision to initiate radical social transformation through making an example of his personal life. If “the battle between Moleka and him was one of visionaries” (110), then Margaret’s bed is taken away as part of the same strategy in which Maru decides to make her his wife. Even her exceptional talent at painting is never presented as an instance of active (or individual) self-expression. It is ultimately doubly subsumed--- when it is understood to have been mysteriously directed by Maru himself (through some unexplained spiritual telepathy) as a step towards the realisation of *his* emancipatory project¹¹; or it is treated as a

¹¹ Maru takes one of her paintings away “as if it were his rightful possession” (98). Later he wonders: How had he done it? How had he projected his dreams on someone so far removed from him? That sort of thing was meat and drink for Maru but it changed the picture when some other living being was on the receiving end of his dreams, especially such a true and sensitive recorder as Margaret (104).

revolutionary “symbol of her tribe”, its irrepressible “vitality” and its move towards “eventual liberation” (108). Head ends the novel on a utopian note, presenting the marriage between Margaret and Maru as a symbolic union that inspires wider social liberation:

When people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru’s marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. The wind of freedom which was blowing throughout the world for all people, turned and flowed into the room. As they breathed in the fresh, clear air their humanity awakened. They examined their condition [...]. They started to run out into the sunlight, then they turned and looked at the dark, small room. They said: ‘We are not going back there’ (126-127).

Head’s own attitude to such an apparently ideal consummation is ambiguous: she seems to affirm that it is only through the unilateral, visionary actions of exceptional individuals within the social elite that a nation’s history can be redirected and attitudes pervasively transformed. The Masarwa are presented as passive, languishing timelessly, unconsciously and helplessly until they are ‘awakened’. But buried underneath the fairy-tale absoluteness of such a conclusion, Head also provides many hints of the price Margaret personally pays in exchange for the honour of being co-opted into such a crucial role for her people. Once she had defined her own life’s project as a performative experiment to “find out how Bushmen were going to stay alive on this earth [...] except perhaps as slaves and downtrodden dogs of the Batswana. That half she would be left alone to solve” (18). But even though “in her heart she [has] grown beyond any definition” because of her education and her upbringing, and sees herself as “a little bit of everything in the whole universe” (20), she never loses the sense that “there was nothing to uphold her” (63): “there was a limit to which a human being could be an experiment, [...] [but] should she even try to claim that she was human” (62-63)? And though her experiences have trained her not to expect ever to be loved, Maru’s intervention ensures that she cannot be with the only man who made her feel like “the most important person on earth” (113). She has to accept her fate: “I am peaceful because I have nothing and I want nothing” (114).

If Rushdie presents Sufiya Zinobia as her nation's scapegoat, the eventual consequence of the various perversions of its fundamental building principles, Margaret's life, for Head, is the symbolic ground upon which both the oppression of her people and the processes leading to their liberation are enacted. The latter ending might appear more optimistic than the former, but both novels perform aspects of the ironies and the crises involved in a feminine subaltern habitation of history *and* the questions of its representation in narrative. Margaret's passivity, her individual crises of self-cognition, metonymically stand in for the social situation of her people; but there remain unresolved ambiguities both in Head's apparent affirmation that Margaret's sacrifice of will and agency is the necessary price that must be paid in order for any transformation to happen, as well as in how the narrative presents the possibility of transformation only occurring top-down through the 'self-unclassing' benevolence of an individual patriarch, rather than through a demonstration of subaltern agency that actively influences and re-articulates its own history. All this is why Head's concluding statement of radical change remains ultimately unconvincing.

Conclusion: Novelistic Fullness and 'Feminist Historiography'.

Women are both of and not of the nation. Between woman and nation is, perhaps, the space or zone where we can deconstruct these monoliths and render them more historically nuanced and accountable to politics (Kaplan, Alarcon and Moallem, 1999, 12). [...] Nationalism, or even [...] 'de-nationalisation' cannot bring us to this site of betweenness that allows us to query these productions of modernity. How to imagine or re-theorise this space of betweenness or relationality that structures [...] sexual politics and geopolitics (14)?

The two chapters of this section have read these novels for the fullness of their portrayals of women-in-the-world in order to establish how such fictionalising achieves an inclusive mode of discourse in which discussions of any one dimension of human existence (for instance, the political-national) does not imply the "subordination or demise" of another (such as the 'women's question'). We wished to demonstrate the

contrary--- that the ontological demand implicit in novels for comprehensive narratives of human being-in-the-world are well suited to perform the aims set out in Sangari and Vaid's manifesto of 'feminist historiography', whereby the issue is no longer "the tokenist inclusion of women or the numerical or even qualitative evaluation of their participation in this or that movement". Rather, such novelising as we have examined "acknowledges that each aspect of reality is gendered" and compels us to "rethink historiography as a whole [...] in order to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by the wide set of social relations, [...] [and thereby] as a choice which cannot but undergird *any* attempt at a historical reconstruction which attempts to demonstrate our sociality in the *full* sense" (Sangari & Vaid, 1993, 3).

Yet these novels avoid another danger, by not succumbing themselves to the temptation of constructing any monolithic homogeneities (or delusory 'solidarities') along the lines of the 'third world woman' that critics such as Spivak and Talpade Mohanty have famously dismantled in the works of various Western feminists. Talpade Mohanty outlines the fundamental premises underlying such a construction--- "the assumption of women as an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally" (McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, 1998, 259)--- which then allows similar methodologies to be applied everywhere to discover more-or-less identical examples of the 'oppressed woman' throughout the 'third world'. In many instances, we found narratives of female characters that ultimately conclude pessimistically. Yet our objective was not to establish that these are novels about uniformly successful role models of feminine resistance, but rather the extent of existential engagement undertaken by them in their exploration of diverse locations, voices, and trajectories of women in African and Indian societies. Further, as Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem go on to argue, "the figure of 'woman' participates in the imaginary of the nation-state

beyond the purview of patriarchies" (12). National discourses and their mythologies and iconographies, under the terms of a 'feminist historiography', are found never to be gender-neutral:

In these respects, notions such as country, homeland, [...] locality, and ethnicity and their construction through racialisation, sexualisation, and genderisation of female corporeality become crucial sites of inquiry and investigation (Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem, 1999, 14).

Thus the narratives of characters such as Rushdie's Sufiya Zinobia, Head's Margaret Cadmore, Rosa Burger or Achebe's Beatrice, and Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, disrupt the homogenising tendencies of nationalist pedagogy and "critique the naturalisation and essentialisation of nation and woman" (Kaplan et al., 1999, 13).

If, as Radhakrishnan puts it, "nationalist totality [...] is an example of a 'bad totality', and feminist historiography secedes from that structure, not to set up a different and oppositional form of totality, but to establish a different relationship to totality" (Castle, 2001, 193-194), we have attempted to demonstrate through our spectrum of investigation that fiction's multivalent capacity to evoke diverse and conflicting voices, worlds, dimensions, and trajectories achieves precisely the alternative relationship he envisions. And through such performances, these novels re-orient our entire view of the worlds these women inhabit, thus evoking the possibility of "an integrated cultural politics" (2001, 192), which, in Radhakrishnan's words, "suggests that no one discourse or historiography has the ethico-political legitimacy to represent the totality, and that the concept of totality should be understood not as a pre-given horizon, but as a necessary and inevitable 'effect' or function of the many relational dialogues, contestations and asymmetries among the many positions [...] that constitute the total field (193-194).

Section 4: Refusing the Nation: Other Resolutions.

Introduction: A 'Non-National' Section.

In an essay questioning what it is that is spoken for as the subject of Indian histories, Dipesh Chakrabarty qualifies Ronald Inden's praise of the Subaltern Studies project for exhibiting "sustained signs of reappropriating the capacity to represent (Indians) [within the discipline of history]... perhaps for the first time since colonisation", as being "gratifying but premature". He offers instead a "more perverse proposition":

That in so far as the academic discourse of history--- that is, 'history' as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university--- is concerned, 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe'. In this sense, 'Indian' history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this history (Mongia, 1996, 222).

This provocative declaration is then substantiated and later summarised:

So long as one operates within the discourse of 'history' produced at the institutional site of the university, it is not possible simply to walk out of the deep collusion between 'history' and the modernising narrative(s) of citizenship, bourgeois public and private, and the nation state. 'History' as a knowledge system is firmly embedded in institutional practices that invoke the nation state at every step [...]. One only has to ask for instance: why is history a compulsory part of the education of the modern person in all countries today including those that did quite comfortably without it until as late as the eighteenth century? [...] It does not take much imagination to see that the reason for this lies in what European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together: the universalisation of the nation state as the most desirable form of political community. Nation states have the capacity to enforce their truth games, and universities [...] are part of the battery of institutions complicit in this process. 'Economics' and 'History' are the knowledge forms that correspond to the two major institutions that the rise (and later universalisation) of the bourgeois order has given to the world--- the capitalist mode of production and the nation state ('history' speaking to the figure of the citizen). [...] Since these themes will always take us back to the universalist propositions of 'modern' European political philosophy--- [...] a third-world historian is condemned to knowing 'Europe' as the original home of the 'modern' [...]. Thus follows the everyday subalternity of non-Western histories with which I began this paper (240).

Chakrabarty thus uncovers to what extent anti-colonial movements have themselves been willingly and calculatedly complicit in this post-Hegelian privileging of those historical narratives that portray a nationalist moment as being the only conceivable consummation of modern political liberty and large-scale fraternity. His potential project by contrast, from which most of this section will take its cue, is to 'provincialise' such Eurocentric teleologies--- first of all by recovering histories that foreground "other narratives of the self and community that do not look to the state/citizen bind as the ultimate construction of sociality" (232) and yet have always existed "in contestation, alliance and miscegenation" as integral dynamics within the history of modern India--- without subsuming such heterogeneous trajectories under a "transition narrative" that will always ultimately privilege the becoming of the modernist nation state (240).¹ Furthermore, Chakrabarty's re-premised and re-oriented historiographic work is to be an exploration into whether these "other constructions of self and community" might themselves now "enjoy the privilege of providing the metanarratives or teleologies (assuming that there cannot be a narrative without at least an implicit teleology) of (non-Western) histories" (232). And yet, Chakrabarty is only too aware of the epistemological impossibility of any distinct separation of one mode of historicism from another, both because modern post-colonial existence has always implied continual immersion in various dimensions of becoming *simultaneously* (modernist dimensions, as well as those he refers to as "antihistorical" and "antimodern", both of which characterisations we shall explore in this chapter), and for the reason that wholly radical interpretative paradigms "are (perhaps) impossible within the knowledge protocols of academic history, for the globality of academia is not independent of the globality that the European modern has created" (243). In a

¹ Clearly comparable in many respects to the Sangari-Vaid-Radhakrishnan envisioning of 'feminist historiography' upon which we premised our last section. Recall also Bhabha's articulation via Kristeva and Benjamin of radically heterogeneous histories and 'times' performed within national becoming that remain impossible to encompass within any single nationalist pedagogy or discursive horizon.

Spivakesque/Foucauldian vein, he recognises that such a history “attempts the impossible” and must therefore necessarily “embody the politics of despair” (243):

It will have been clear by now that this is not a call for cultural relativism or for atavistic, nativist histories. Nor is this a program for a simple rejection of modernity, which would, in many situations, be politically suicidal. [...] I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices [...]. The politics of despair will require of such history that it lays bare to its readers why such a predicament is necessarily inescapable. [...] [Yet], to attempt to provincialise this ‘Europe’ is to see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections [...] so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous” (243-244).

Why should a study with a thesis to pursue devote an entire section to exploring counter-possibilities to its guiding propositions? Our work has looked thus far at narratives of individual and collective involvement of selves inhabiting various social locations and trajectories within the becomings of post-colonial societies, where nationhood has been positioned as the primary focus of our investigation; the fundamental contractual paradigm and existential/interpretative horizon by which the agents of post-colonial life are understood to orient and direct their beings-in-the-world. We have already inquired into dimensions such as ethnicity, tradition, domesticity, and religion, and their implications within a new nation’s post-independence becoming. It is in keeping with the continuity of such multivalent explorations that we will focus here on attempts at alternative understandings of selves-- and their locations and histories--- that *refuse* to take their bearings (solely) from a teleological orientation provided by the history of the nation-state. Most of the novels and characters in this section demonstrate that the nation is only one frame of reference among various others within which to locate and interpret African and Indian beings and their worlds, that there are many more dimensions to their ‘worldedness’ than being (just) ‘national’ or even ‘post-colonial’.

Fredric Jameson, for one, would not grant 'Third World' histories any such scope for heterogeneous articulation. He has argued, in a much-challenged formulation:

Let me now, by way of a sweeping hypothesis, try to say what all third-world cultural productions seem to have in common and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world. All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel (2000, 319).

Jameson's argument stands on a distinction he draws between the ways in which the public-private, personal-political divides are understood and examined in Western culture as opposed to the 'culture' of the 'third world' where "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (320): to him this 'political projection' always assumes the form of *national* allegory. It is beyond the scope of this study to fully engage with refuting various problematic aspects of his argument, but it is as untenable a suggestion that *all* novels of the West rehearse and confirm the splits between political and personal diagnosis that Jameson identifies, as it is to argue that all (and only) 'third-world' literatures always perform national allegories. As Deleuze and Guattari's investigations of Kafka and other (Western and non-Western) 'minoritarian' literatures show (1986), thoroughly 'interactive' and 'worlded' narrative enquiry happens within novels from everywhere. From *Don Quixote* to *Underworld* and including *War and Peace*, *A Sentimental Education*, Balzac's entire *Comedie Humaine*, *The Man without Qualities*, *Ulysses*, *The Adventures of Augie March* and Updike's *Rabbit* novels, just to name a few, Western fictions (in Russia, France, Germany, America and England) have in countless instances organised their investigations of selves and worlds along national lines, where the narratives of individuals have allowed novelists to metonymically represent and investigate particular phases of a society's becoming. Moreover, such trends show no signs of abating even in these "deterritorialised" and globalised times, particularly not from America, where a surfeit of diverse cultural products continues to emerge with titles beginning with the defining word 'American'

(*-Beauty, -Pastoral, -Pie, -Werewolf, -Movie*). Also, in writers ranging from Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Joyce, Celine and Hermann Broch in *The Sleepwalkers* to DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon, one would need to overlook a lot of Western literary history to suggest that personal and political, and psychic and historical investigations, are not being conducted simultaneously and inter-relatedly. Ultimately, it is as reductive and misleading to separate cultural production into world zones in any such way as it is subsume the range and diversity of post-colonial cultural production under a nationalist teleology, which is what we hope to prove in this section. Thus, being comprehensively 'socialised' does not imply only thinking along national lines, and thinking along national lines is not the exclusive slightly 'lagging-behind-the-West' preoccupation of the 'third-world' alone. Jameson correctly points out:

None of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, [...] [because] they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism--- a cultural struggle that is itself a reflection of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernisation (318-19).

Yet we will argue that despite recognising the pervasive social impact of both the economic forces and nationalist frameworks that Jameson outlines and Chakrabarty acknowledges, various African and Indian novels, through narrative strategies of an extraordinary variety, have probed their worlds from a range of angles and directions that refuse, resist or redefine any potentially deterministic conception of the nation-state as the dominant, *inescapable* frame of reference for all post-colonial existence. If such a pervasive culture of national allegorising indeed prevailed, there would exist not just the danger of pre-conceived interpretative determinism, but more, we would have to concede that the post-colonial novel might degenerate from an act of radical re-inscription (as we have argued it to be), into the kind of coercive consolidation that Said finds in *Culture and Imperialism* to be the animating ideology behind much of nineteenth-century English fiction. The ingenuity of such heterogeneously framed and directed existential explorations--- no less engaged or 'worlded', no less dynamic,

historicised or 'political' for not being merely 'national'--- cautions us against the folly of reducing our interpretations of social becoming by privileging one of its horizons over all others. And finally, they count as vital instances in any interrogation of 'post-coloniality' itself, as a valid term that is meant to cover genuinely specific ranges of human predicament by establishing credible connections between widely differing worlds and histories without subsuming them under any homogenising, non-viable 'bad totality'.

Leela Gandhi and Anthony Appiah² both make an important distinction (although differently) between "the people-who-comprise-the-nation and the State-which-represents-the-nation" (Gandhi, 1998, 119). Gandhi argues that even if the nation-state is assumed to be "the proper end of (anti-colonial) nationalism, [...] that point at which the narrative of nation-making achieves its generic closure and therefore its distinctive generic identity" (120), there has been released as part of the same movement an "autonomous political imagination of the people-who-comprise-the-nation [...] spoken in a distinctly popular, indigenous and pre-colonial idiom" (120), the "recalcitrant elements, characters and actions" of which "are ultimately in excess of the generic closure proposed by the postcolonial nation-state" (120). More than anything else, it is the irreducible aggregate of such heterogeneous agents and dimensions--- a spectrum of which we will now examine over two chapters ranging from high-bourgeois families to narrative treatments of rural and urban subalternity and encompassing possibilities of solidarity and community as well as instances of individual survival--- that prevents post-independence national life and discourse in Africa and India from lapsing (or

² Appiah marks a transition we have discussed already, between 'realist' African fictions that represent the "stage of nationalist legitimization" to a post-realist disavowal of nationalism, that bases itself not on any Western conception of 'deterritorialised' post-modernist relativism, but on "an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years". See Appiah (1992, 240-250).

being theorised) into a merely “derivative” copy of its European predecessors, as Partha Chatterjee has doubted and writers such as V S Naipaul have decreed.

Again, a reminder would be appropriate here that our investigation limits itself to fictions that engage with post-independence moments and phases *on* post-colonial territories--- that is, African and Indian societies and environments. This would thereby exclude novels examining the implications of ‘metropolitan’ migration, works such as *The Satanic Verses*, *White Teeth* or the England based novels of Buchi Emecheta, to name a few instances. Even though such migration obviously counts as attempts towards ‘non-nationalist’ existential resolution for many (millions of) Africans and Indians, various aspects of the resulting changes in First-World societies constitute already well-researched areas of post-colonial studies.

Chapter 8: Family, Place, and Community Instead of the Nation.

A Suitable Boy: The Nation within the Family.

What novelistic ambition of attaining a Lukacsian ‘objective totality’ would compel Seth to include as many dimensions, locations, generations, classes and processes of Indian life as possible in his novel, and how does it contain them all? Is such a portrait of India merely a narrative achievement facilitated by the flexibility and scope of the novel-form, or does Seth detect and perform possibilities of actual connections between selves and communities across utterly heterogeneous expanses of Indian time and space?

The extended family is Seth’s primary narrative device, enabling him to structure, diversify and contain his material at the same time. Further, being-in-the-world, in Seth’s world, is being in and of a family: he portrays the family as the fundamental basis for how Indian selves, individually and collectively (irrespective of class or religion, or town and country), take their bearings within wider society. Reversing nationalist priorities that would subsume other trajectories of social history within a narrative of national becoming, Seth narrates the ‘traditional’ Indian family as the primary national-awareness instrument of a newly independent India (rather than the new modern state), in how it introduces individuals to many unfamiliar areas and processes of society simply through its wide-ranging webs of connection and acquaintance. But unlike the novels of Rushdie or Arundhati Roy, the family in Seth is also a reliably ‘timeless’ retreat into which characters can withdraw from the dynamism of the worlds around them into the enduring stability of pre-defined identities: a basis of Indian ‘Being’ apparently immune to the transformations wrought by its historical becomings. Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee detect similar modes of orientation and self-definition operating within colonial Indian history, which Chakrabarty argues “is replete with instances where Indians arrogated subjecthood to

themselves precisely by mobilising, within the context of 'modern' institutions and sometimes on behalf of the modernising project of nationalism, devices of collective memory that were both antihistorical and antimodern:

This is not to deny the capacity of Indians to act as subjects endowed with what we in the universities would recognise as 'a sense of history' [...], but to insist at the same time that there were also contrary trends, that in the multifarious struggles that took place in colonial India, antihistorical constructions of the past often provided very powerful forms of collective memory (Mongia, 1996, 239).³

Reconciling Individuality and Family.

For both of these theorists, among the primary "antihistorical" 'non-modernist' modes of community and solidarity--- which formed "one of the most important elements in the cultural politics of Indian nationalism"--- is "the metaphor of the sanctified and patriarchal extended family" (Mongia, 1996, 238). Chakrabarty delineates further implications of the power and persistence of an existential dimension with such a distinct ontology, and its own modes of classifying its members and the roles and spheres of their lives:

According to the fable of their constitution, Indians today are all 'citizens'. The constitution embraces almost a classically liberal definition of citizenship [in which] the modern state and the modern individual, the citizen, are but the two inseparable sides of the same phenomenon [...]. This modern individual, however, whose political/public life is lived in citizenship, is also supposed to have an interiorised 'private' self that pours out incessantly in diaries, letters, autobiographies, novels, and of course in what we say to our analysts. The bourgeois individual is not born until one discovers the pleasures of privacy. [...]

Indian public life may mimic on paper the bourgeois legal fiction of citizenship--- [...] but what about the bourgeois private and its history? Anyone who has tried to write 'French' social history with Indian material would know how impossibly difficult the task is. It is not that the form of the bourgeois private did not come with European rule. [...] [Yet] our autobiographies are remarkably 'public' (with constructions of public life that are not necessarily modern) when written by men, and they tell the story of the extended family when written by women. In any case, autobiographies in the confessional mode

³ And according to Chatterjee, as we have seen already:

The [...] state [...] is kept out of the 'inner' domain of national culture; but it is not as though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not Western (1993, 6).

are notable for their absence [...] How do we read this [...]? Public without private? Yet another instance of the 'incompleteness' of bourgeois transformation in India (1996, 230-232)?

In fact, in all the huge cast of Seth's novel, nowhere is the self ever experienced or defined as isolated except in two cases, both with disastrous consequences. Rasheed finds himself homeless, cut off from his family and from his inheritance, because of the landowning legacy that he despises for its ongoing history of injustice and oppression. Yet Seth narrates his descent into paranoia and suicide as if it were almost inevitable following this exile: all his individual efforts at reform are proven to be powerless. It is as though any solitary efforts to participate in history and exert influence over its transformations are necessarily doomed, especially because Rasheed attempts to act without (and worse, against) the insulation provided by his sacred ties to clan and community:

He believed that will and effort could get him anywhere. He attempted bravely, fervently, perhaps obsessively to reconcile everything--- family life, learning, calligraphy, personal honour, order, ritual, God, agriculture, history, politics; this world and all the other worlds, in short--- into a comprehensible whole. [...] And it seemed to Maan [...] that [Rasheed] was wearing himself out by feeling so deeply and taking on so insistently all the burdens and responsibilities of mankind (1994, 724).

And later, Maan wonders if Rasheed is "not a victim of the tragedy of the countryside, of the country itself", "forced to choose between loyalty and justice, between trust and pity" (1289).

Yet his family is anguished by what they can only consider his betrayal. His ideals are terribly wrong to them: they are righteously blind to the implications of their 'time-hallowed' ruthlessness towards their landless tenants, but even more, they cannot comprehend how anything could have more sanctity to an individual than his family's interests. His father laments:

Rasheed treats us as if we are ignorant to the core. He writes us letters, threatening us and boasting of his own humanism. Everything has gone--- logic, respect, decency; but his pride and his sense of self, lunatically remain.

When I read his letters I weep [...]. He had a classmate who became a dacoit. Even he treats his family with more respect (1288).

Chakrabarty points to “a similar connection between the modern ‘free’ individual and selfishness” (Mongia, 1996, 235) within the nineteenth century Bengali literature extolling the virtues and the pre-eminent claims of the extended family. The other self set apart is Saeeda Bai, the ‘public woman’ who is left abandoned at the end, because being a courtesan keeps her from ever belonging in a world where one’s truest self is no more than the sum of one’s (legitimate) familial ties.

Every individual in Seth’s world conceals or surrenders something of him- or herself in compromise, as Chakrabarty above describes, and knows that they are forever to be subjected in various degrees to “the pressure of the family, the extended family that enforced a slow and strong acceptance on its members” (Seth, 1994, 986); yet no one but Rasheed feels paralysed by such a realisation. Such an ahistorical (even ‘antihistorical’, as Chakrabarty would call it) basis for self-orientation and navigation is not only taken for granted, but is seen as an essential, conservative yet creative, perpetuating principle that enables existence itself to continue at all levels, interpersonal and social. In Seth’s novel, there are numerous intelligent, independent-minded people even of a younger generation, clearly able to identify the contradictions and limits of their own positions, who nevertheless prefer a conservative torpor to any unchecked (Rushdian) assertions of individual will and selfhood. Pran and Savita cannot name their own baby themselves, because “the baby had been born not to a couple, but to a clan” (953). Near the end the narrator formulates the essence of the family as a “thread of love” (1458) that each member is under an imperative not to break--- especially not to assert their individuality--- because “what breaks won’t join; if joined, it knots the thread” (1458).

Narrating the Nation through the Family.

Perhaps the fuller implications of what Seth reveals about the dual role of the family--- as the unchanging (yet ever accommodating and continually relevant) basis upon which the processes of national and individual life occur--- become clearer when we set the methods of his portrayal against Rushdie's entirely subjectivised narratives of self, family, and world. Unlike *Midnight's Children* or *The Moor's Last Sigh*, no individual is ever at the heart of Seth's novel for any prolonged period. Instead, what centres his work, through the device and organism of the family, is the potential of the novel form itself: its Tolstoyan capacities for 'narrative calculus' and its Bakhtinian ability to contain and perform social heteroglossia, yet both incorporated within a Lukacsian conception of portraying apparently 'objective totalities'. The invisible omniscient narrator is the true protagonist of *A Suitable Boy*, and the formal basis of Seth's novel-as-national-portrait. As Lukacs would expect of the most exemplary 'critical realists', every possible aspect and dimension of a society is contextualised and painstakingly drawn to scale. Seth reveals clues to the architecture of his work: a banyan tree plan and another based on the structure of an Indian Raag:

It sprouts, and grows, and spreads, and drops down branches that become trunks or inter-twine with other branches. Sometimes branches die. Sometimes the main trunk dies, and the structure is held up by the supporting trunks. [...] It has its own life--- but so do the snakes and birds and bees and lizards and termites that live in it and on it and off it (524).

The absence of a centralised ('confessional') individuality--- in the bourgeois-private sense of Rushdie's narrators that Chakrabarty describes above--- and its replacement by a vision of the stable enduring family as the novel's primary epistemological procedure is crucial to Seth's investigations of individual and national becomings in India. Yet, in his work, this conception of a transcendent, 'timeless', immutable network can paradoxically accommodate an immense, mutually conflicting and dynamic spectrum of social heteroglossia, encompassing narratives of parliamentary, public and inter-personal family life, legislative arguments, riots, festivals, disasters, rail journeys,

villages, elections and cities. Seth portrays through the extended web of four families and their acquaintances entire spectra of social, political and economic life, assembles the conflicts of a narrative cast that includes members of three generations and faiths, and brings together worlds as far apart as upper-bourgeois Indo-European Calcutta society and villages where the landed gentry continue in age-old fashion to oppress their tenants and the landless. He captures the rich symbiotic influence of centuries of Hindu and Muslim co-existence (in the worlds of classical Hindustani music and in rituals of daily life and friendship), as much as the intransigence of communal hatred and the remarkable lacunae of genuine mutual incomprehension and ignorance even after a millennium of cohabitation. The novel uncovers much transition--- land and social reform, elections, debates on every level about versions of the nation recently born and to be fashioned--- and yet carefully contextualises themes that remain unchanged (life for the landless in Salimpur village, the frozen attitudes of the landed): “nine months after the murder of Gandhi, the constitutional provision abolishing untouchability was passed by the Constituent Assembly, and its members broke out into loud cheers, [...] however little the measure was to mean in practical as opposed to symbolic terms” (1132). Entire generations are dialogically anatomised as Seth examines conflicting attitudes and life-trajectories, each of which are shaped by and reveal further processes and locations that all heterogeneously, incompatibly comprise India. His work demonstrates the novel’s capacities for spatial histories and ‘critical realism’ through its exercise of ‘narrative calculus’--- in its (de)constructing of an epoch with its diversely layered (and directed) beings, worlds, and becomings. In another instance, Rasheed’s father declares his intransigence regarding any land reform legislation:

The whole world is being destroyed. These people are selling the country. And now they are trying to take away the land that our forefathers earned with their sweat and blood. Well, no one is going to take away a single bigha of my land. [...] I can tell you that things will get worse and worse. As it is, things have begun to fall apart (731).

Thus each transition comes under scrutiny in its multiple aspects not only to reveal how simultaneous and yet contradictory so many lived, imagined, believed versions of India can be, but to inquire of a nation reinvented in modernist terms how 'actual' its modernity is, and how many strands of its various pasts persist and participate in such a re-invention.

And the family is the structuring mechanism that allows Seth his simultaneous discussions of so many aspects, strata and locations of Indian life: national narration through familial networking. Through the clan, multiplied still further in its links to other vast clans by way of marriage or friendship, he captures not merely India in microcosm, but (what he portrays as) the society's basis and horizon of Being itself. Seth performs two simultaneous and related reversals of the usual priorities of the Western modern novel by altering both its conceptions of 'public' and 'private', and thereby its very ontological basis for narrating. First, he replaces individual consciousness (in the Rushdian, or Joycean, modernist sense) with a portrait of the extended family as the central protagonist of his work. Furthermore, he formats not merely his 'narrative calculus' but the society's entire history within the demands and limits of the Indian extended family--- thus organising and framing what Tolstoy saw as the unquantifiably infinite and dynamic extents of any historical epoch within its secure boundaries, and muffling (if not always resolving) the full volume of Bakhtinian heteroglossic social cacophony. In fact, his narrative predicates itself on the "two denials" (1996, 237) that Chakrabarty considers constitutive of the cultural politics of Indian nationalism: "the denial, or at least, contestation, of the bourgeois private and, equally important, the denial of historical time by making the family a site where the sacred and the secular blended in a perpetual re-enactment of a principle that was heavenly and divine" (237).

Of course, the upholding of hierarchies on interpersonal, familial, and social levels that are often confessedly (and proudly) static and patriarchal also involves Seth having to acknowledge (and sometimes even condone) the implied costs of valorising such conservatism. Chakrabarty acknowledges the same dilemmas:

The cultural space the antihistorical invoked was by no means harmonious or non-conflictual, though nationalist thought of necessity tried to portray it to be so. The antihistorical norms of the patriarchal extended family, for example, could only have had a contested existence, contested both by women's struggles and by those of the subaltern classes (Mongia, 1996, 237).

In Seth's world, such prices are paid most obviously by the numerous unacknowledged, nearly unknown wives of some of the novel's principal patriarchs, the landless subalterns (and people of lower castes) whose conditions no amount of parliamentary legislation seems to affect, and characters such as Rasheed who view historical becoming in more individualist and radically transformatory terms:

As for Rasheed, [...] it was not true that one could change everything through effort and vehemence and will. The stars maintained their courses despite his madness, and the village world moved on as before, swerving only very slightly to avoid him (1994, 1290).

Yet, despite such ironies, and despite "bespeak[ing] an antihistorical consciousness" that "entails subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of [modernist, nationalist] history" (Mongia, 1996, 232), Seth does novelistically realise the ambition Chakrabarty has earlier deemed impossible within the "knowledge procedures" (240) of academic history:

[of how] these other constructions of self and community, while documentable in themselves, will never enjoy the privilege of providing the metanarratives and teleologies (assuming that there cannot be a narrative without at least an implicit teleology) of our histories (232).

Questioning the Endurance of Malgudi: Naipaul on Narayan.

In two travel narratives written fifteen years apart, V S Naipaul reflects on a remark that R K Narayan made to him at a gathering in London--- that “India will go on” (Naipaul, 1978, 18)--- and builds on it to illuminate and simultaneously unravel the endurance of Narayan’s fictional world of Malgudi. Naipaul’s charge is that “Narayan’s novels [had] not prepared [him] for the distress of India” (21). In Malgudi, by writing only of “small men, small schemes, [their] big talk [and] limited means”, Narayan contemplates a life that is “so circumscribed that it appears whole and unviolated” (19). Its “smallness was never a subject for wonder” to Narayan, Naipaul alleges, “though India itself is felt to be vast” (19). Then follows Naipaul’s patronising if empathetic diagnosis:

Well, that was where we all began, all of us who are over forty and were colonials, subject people who had learned to live with the idea of subjection. We lived within our lesser world: and we could even pretend it was whole because we had forgotten that it had been shattered. Disturbance, instability, development lay elsewhere; we, who had lost our wars and were removed from great events, were at peace. In life, as in literature, we received tourists (20-21).

The India Naipaul finally arrived in, the “*Area of Darkness*”, the “*Wounded Civilisation*”, is by contrast, “cruel and overwhelming” (21). And here Naipaul realises that “to get down to Narayan’s world”:

To perceive the order and continuity he saw in the dereliction and smallness of India, to enter into his ironic acceptance and relish his comedy, was to ignore too much of what could be seen, to shed too much of myself: my sense of history, and even the simplest ideas of human possibility. [...] His comedy and irony were (no longer) quite what they had appeared to be, were part of a Hindu response to the world, a response I could no longer share (21).

Narayan’s novels now come to seem “less the purely social comedies [Naipaul] had once taken them to be than religious books, at times religious fables, and intensely Hindu” (21). Elsewhere, after analysing another of his books, he describes Narayan as “instinctive” and unstudied” (41), “negative” and “incapable of self-assessment” (1970, 216), all of which qualities are then intellectually traced to the fact of Narayan being Hindu. In fact, fifteen years earlier in his first book on India, Naipaul actually

makes the same diagnosis his basis for undermining not only Narayan, but almost all of Indian fiction, and by extension, understanding an entire civilisational malaise:

Indian attempts at the novel further reveal the Indian confusion. The novel is of the West. It is part of that Western concern with the condition of men, a response to the here and now. In India thoughtful men have preferred to turn their backs on the here and now and to satisfy what President Radhakrishnan calls 'the basic human hunger for the unseen'. It is not a good qualification for the writing or reading of novels" (1970, 214).

By way of contrast and clarification, it is in a lecture given two decades later that Naipaul provides one of his clearest portraits of exactly the kind of civilisation that is required to produce the sort of literature he is seeking, as opposed to environments such as (for instance) the "instinctive, ritualised life" of his Hindu background, "the unpromising conditions of colonial Trinidad", or the non-Arab cultures in which he has travelled, "among a colonised people who had been stripped by their faith of all that expanding intellectual life, all the varied life of the mind and senses, the expanding cultural and historical knowledge of the world" (2002, 512). In Naipaul's vision, this can only be a gradually globalising version of Western civilisation that he deems to be 'universal' in its creative appeal and flexible, inclusive potential, "because of the extraordinary attempt of this civilisation (since the end of the last war) to accommodate the rest of the world, and all the currents of that world's thought" (516), even though he acknowledges:

The universal civilisation has been a long time in the making. It wasn't always universal; it wasn't always as attractive as it is today. The expansion of Europe gave it for at least three centuries a racial tint, which still causes pain (516).

To Naipaul, the "attractiveness" that makes the universality of this particular world-view so desirable is exemplified most evidently in "the beauty of [its] idea of the pursuit of happiness":

The idea has come to a kind of fruition. It is an elastic idea; it fits all men. It implies a certain kind of society, a certain kind of awakened spirit. I don't imagine my father's parents would have been able to understand the idea. So much is contained in it: the idea of the individual, responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement. It is an immense human idea. It cannot be reduced to a fixed system. It cannot generate

fanaticism. But it is known to exist; and because of that, other more rigid systems in the end blow away (517).

It is therefore evident to Naipaul as a corollary how he owes his own literary formation to such a civilisation, and why it is in fact the only world from which can emerge literature that sceptically, courageously, and dynamically engages with the world in all its diverse fullness.⁴

Narayan's Malgudi: Deconstructing the 'Timeless'.

Naipaul dismisses Malgudi as a small town of men leading lives so circumscribed and static they are never even aware of its limits. It is true in *The Maneater of Malgudi* that Nataraj has not crossed the river in decades to visit the other side of town, as hasn't Jagan, *The Vendor of Sweets*, whose daily route between his home and his shop define the limits of his physical world until the events of the novel. But Jagan's 'smallness' is no secret to him. He sighs at the thought that "for years his fixed orbit had been between the statue and the shop, his mental operations confined to Mali, the cousin and frying" (1980, 112). He recalls the lost friends of his youth, the ecstasy of Gandhi's visit, the peace of the riverside at dusk that he has not known in decades:

He went on talking and Jagan realised agape as if a new world had flashed into view. He suddenly realised how narrow his whole existence had been---between the Lawley Statue and the frying shop (119-120).

Yet among the exploratory priorities of both narratives are the performances of their central characters becoming aware of not only the new intrusions that directly affect

⁴ Naipaul makes his own development a point in case:

I didn't possess the rituals and the myths; I saw them at a distance. But I had in exchange been granted the ideas of inquiry and the tools of scholarship. Identity for me was a more complicated matter. Many things had gone to make me. But there was no problem for me there. Whole accumulations of scholarship were mine, in the sense that I had access to them. I could carry four or five or six different cultural ideas in my head. I knew about my ancestry and my ancestral culture; I knew about the history of India and its political status; I knew where I was born, and I knew the history of the place; I had a sense of the New World. I knew about the literary forms I was interested in; and I knew about the journey I would have to make to the centre in order to exercise the vocation I had given myself (512).

their lives, but of their town itself, the human variety contained within and beyond this apparently well-known and unchanging world, where both Jagan and Nataraj continue to live in the ancestral homes they were born in. The cast of *The Maneater of Malgudi* includes dancers and women of disrepute, adjournment lawyers, foresters, temple elephants, taxidermists, ex-wrestlers, teashop owners, bus conductors, master sculptors, and animal doctors; in the course of the novel, Nataraj, always for the first time, meets them all. Narayan's novels are comedies that enact how multiple, simultaneous becomings are forced upon haplessly 'worlded' beings, and are thereby also cross-sectional studies of a world undergoing various transitions. Caught in the convergence of the becomings thrust upon him, Nataraj confesses the crime that Naipaul accuses him of--- his smallness. But even now, he confronts it with wonder:

Vasu was like an irrelevant thought. He should have no place in my scheme of things. People I had never seen in my life acted as a padding to my right and left and fore and aft. I had lived a circumscribed life and I had never thought that our town contained such a variety of humanity (1983, 131).

Disparate beings and their multiple collisions--- that is, dynamic histories as enacted in the narrative laboratory of Malgudi--- are Narayan's constant concerns, far from the transcendentalist, ritualised, outside-of-history image that Naipaul foists upon him.

Amit Chaudhuri has written:

The seemingly easy-going affable nature of Narayan's fictional universe has encouraged critics to presume they have it figured out. Critics in the West, especially in America, have praised it for being a microcosm of the "timeless India", transcending that Western-manufactured complication, History; critics in India have condemned it for being a microcosm of the "timeless India", unpermeated by, and stubbornly oblivious to, the liberal, educated Indian's burden, History (The Telegraph (Calcutta), 10-06-01).

Yet Narayan's narratives are entirely dynamic. The frequently expressed longings for stasis are never taken at face value: on the contrary, the characters expressing them are investigated (and exposed) for their thoroughly kinetic 'worldedness'. Far from writing in an un-historicised (Hindu) vein, ("incapable of self assessment": a world-view for which "disturbance, instability (and) development (lie) elsewhere" (Naipaul, 1978, 21)), Narayan dramatises through Jagan and Nataraj the inexperience that is inevitable

when their lives are disrupted by new awakenings at an advanced age, and explores the existential equipment necessary (and lacking) for the self to inhabit a world undergoing multiple transformations. In Nataraj's case these appear embodied in the form of a stranger: for Jagan the stranger is his own son, and the closest of bonds proves to be the most unsettling. Thus, in the course of both narratives, Narayan deconstructs through narrative investigation any essentialist, pre-defined bases of personal identity, family, and community that may appear to recur in his apparently 'timeless' Malgudi. Even the most familiar elements and connections only expose his protagonists further to the implications of their thoroughly dynamic 'worldedness', as well as the challenging imperative that they have to continually re-evaluate and re-direct their humanity or be overwhelmed. Chaudhuri's dissent with any 'timeless' views of Malgudi continues:

The subject of Narayan's fiction is, if anything, the fictionality of "timeless India"; if there is anything it tells us, it is that "timeless India" is a thoroughly modern invention, a figment of the contemporary imagination. To this end he creates a trope for inventedness, Malgudi, a place that, like "timeless India" exists nowhere; and then both lovingly nourishes and mocks our expectation, and need for its existence. [...] [But] scratch a relic of "timeless India" in Malgudi, and you discover a reality that is suburban, modern, dreary, mercantile and petit-bourgeois: Narayan, in his work, is forever driving a sharp wedge between the sheen of the eternal and the tawdriness of modern small-town Indian life (The Telegraph (Calcutta), 10-06-01).

Inextricability is one of Narayan's major themes, from the longings of the self, as well as from the examinations of becoming that the self is unrelentingly put through even in the most familiar of worlds. Yet his fictions are always asking what qualities are needed--- not to transcend, elude, deny or ignore change, as Naipaul alleges--- but to adapt and survive it. Further, Narayan's explorations of these themes are never less than suffused with the ironies of appetite: his characters actually enjoy inhabiting the world along with all of its changes. They are not to be written off for the petty scale of their lives, because there is nothing narrow about the irrepressible (Leopold Bloom-like) quality of their curiosity even in the midst of the greatest difficulties. Nataraj may never have met anyone like Vasu before; he may resent his bullying methods, but he is

also fascinated by his boasts, his strength, and the imprint of the wider world in Vasu's recounting of his life (the world Naipaul would scorn Nataraj for never having seen). Similarly, the conflict between Jagan and his America-returned son is nothing as simple as a conflict between his conservatism and Mali's modernity. Jagan is no simple conservative: like Nataraj he is simply too curious for that. Even his son's deceitful escape to America cannot put him off either that country or his enthusiastic questions about Mali's life there. On the contrary, America and its ways and maxims come to supplement Gandhi's sayings and the Gita as the primary fascination and guiding principles of Jagan's life. If he is a "small man", as Naipaul has characterised Narayan's characters, leading an "instinctive, ritualised" life, he also displays unconcealed pleasure at any report from newer, greater, more 'dynamic' worlds. Nataraj's inexperience of worlds outside his own, and his frequent incompetence in the face of unexpected challenges, is only matched by his curiosity about them. He is helplessly open in his dealings with strangers even in the midst of fears that they will beat or murder him. This is not generally a mark of "small men", to be so restlessly enthusiastic even when confronted by radical otherness. There is nowhere the complacent blindness, the refusal to acknowledge and engage with the implications of inhabiting history, that Naipaul associates with Narayan's writing, and (even further) with India itself:

While his world holds and he is secure, the Indian is a man simply having his being; and he is surrounded by other people having their being. But when the props of family, clan and caste go, chaos and blankness come (1978, 103).

More specifically, about Jagan's final decision to retreat from his business and family, Naipaul has written:

Jagan [...] really has no case. His code does not bear examination. [...] [His] is the ultimate Hindu retreat, because it is a retreat from a world that is known to have broken down at last. It is a retreat, literally, to a wilderness where 'the edge of reality itself was beginning to blur': not a return to a purer Aryan past, as Jagan might imagine, but a retreat from civilisation and creativity, from rebirth and growth, to magic and incantation, a retrogression to an almost African night, the enduring primitivism of a place like the Congo, where, even after the slave trading Arabs and the Belgians, the past is yearned for as *le bon vieux temps de*

nos ancetres. It is the death of a civilisation, the final corruption of Hinduism (1978, 43).

But if Jagan is so contemptible and cowardly, why is it that he insists throughout on giving Mali all the freedom he wants, even though everything that Mali does with this freedom always disconcerts him? Despite having a son and never having left the heart of an absolutely 'known', 'stable', and bounded world, Jagan is finally shown to be alone with his doubts and longings. Yet he never lets Mali's inaccessibility and hostility keep him from repeatedly attempting (in vain) to know his son better, even if he has to embarrass himself and ask outsiders to deliver his questions for him. If caste and clan are such indispensable props of Indian being, how does that explain Jagan's affection (despite his initial reservations) for his Korean daughter-in-law? Even amid the resoluteness of his final withdrawal, and after he has discovered that Grace is not his legitimate daughter-in-law, his humanity still has the elasticity necessary to insist he would pay for a ticket for her to return home if she wanted. "It's a duty we owe her. She was a good girl" (1980, 192). Jagan meets to the end his responsibility to Grace and Mali. He lets nobody down even when retreating. It is the modernised Mali who has used up all her money and then abandoned his promise to marry her.

In Narayan's vision, Mali is the limited one, not because he is modern, but because his modernism is superficial. His superficial understanding of American commerce and inventiveness is exceeded only by his shallower disregard of his father and the ways and values of his place of upbringing. Mali is a failure at business as much as at relationships: just as Jagan's physical and material stability promise him no stillness, Mali's 'modernity' is no guarantee of growth or creativity. Yet importantly, these conflicts in Narayan--- between Vasu and Nataraj or Mali and his father--- are not just simplistically dichotomised conflicts of modern dynamism against tradition and continuity, where either is pre-defined as right or wrong: aspects of both positions are unsparingly ironised and examined in the narratives. All the errors of Jagan and Nataraj

are exposed and recorded; their frequently expressed longing to extricate themselves are undermined entirely by their incompetence in their 'worldly' engagements.

"Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self" (13), begins Jagan in his sweetshop. But when asked *why* the self should be conquered, he confesses he does not know, "but all our sages advise us so" (13). Yet if the novel begins with Jagan quoting existential strategy he does not understand, by the end he has achieved reconciliation with both the unattainability of his son's affections as well as his own isolation. The pre-defined, 'timeless' "props" of family, caste, community and fatherhood have all fallen away, and yet the narrative has recorded a performance of understanding and growth. Jagan now recognises the ineluctable limits of his situation as clearly he formulates the possibility of 'rebirth'. This is scarcely the "Indian" whom Naipaul describes as possessing a "childlike perception of reality", with the "underdeveloped ego" (1978, 102) that allows Indians to be "immersed in their experiences in a way that Western people can seldom be [because] it is less easy for [them] to withdraw and analyse" (103).

How does Malgudi Endure and Survive History?

Selves are the novel's distinct currency, we have argued, the narrative epistemology fiction requires to furnish each attempt at exploring further aspects to the limitless fullness of existence. But we have also established that it is impossible to interpret or narrate selves without taking account of their worlds: if novelistic narrative is to be a thorough examination of beings-in-the-world, it is in its very basis implicitly worlded to the same extent as selves are. Yet Narayan's fiction is at the same time an interrogation of the possibilities of survival (and even freedom) for selves despite their absolute immersion within the currents of multiple transformation. This is never to be mistaken for a concept equivalent to religious transcendentalism--- none of Narayan's novels are

anything like as 'Hindu' as Naipaul argues.⁵ Novels can *never* be 'timeless' just as (and because) they can never be world-less. Narayan leaves few dimensions unexplored--- family, parenthood, modernity, and tradition, always enacted paradoxically in a town his protagonists have known all their lives. Every possible essentialist identity is disrupted by change and/or 'otherness'. His characters survive severe tests to reach different resolutions, but Malgudi, as a place and a community, also endures another re-telling, another re-examination. Time after time, Narayan re-performs his comment to Naipaul, by demonstrating in narrative how worlds within India do "go on".

There is an enduring, elastic quality to such existential resolution that Naipaul, and others, as Chaudhuri points out, find merely 'affectionate' or incredible. How does Narayan manage to narrate characters as immersed within their world, and a world as dynamic and diverse as we have claimed, and yet manage to retrieve the continuities of a community in books set sixty years apart? If Narayan's work is indeed thoroughly historicised, why does it never culminate in the spectacular explosions (of selves and worlds) so characteristic of Rushdie's narratives, or the bitter individual retreats of Naipaul's own novels?

Of course all narrative is selection, manipulation--- Narayan's as much as any other. But the point we hope to have established (*contra* readings such as Naipaul's) is that Narayan takes on the challenge of a fully *engaged* heteroglossic narration of the life of the society he continually re-creates. Another such narrative might yield entirely different results, although equally credible (such as Rushdie's anguish and explosion). Such irregularity is perfectly consistent with the basis and method of the novel. One

⁵ Although, writing precisely against Naipaul, Kipling and other such Western characterisations of apparent Hindu 'stasis', Ashis Nandy puts together an ingeniously argued portrait of how elements of a Hindu identity (might) have been self-consciously marshalled by ordinary people in resisting and subverting colonial rule. It is not within the scope of our discussion to include it here, but see Nandy's chapter on 'The Uncolonised Mind...' (1998, 64-114).

novelist's crisis can co-exist with another's resolution, even when both have been comprehensively imagined and 'worlded'.

Conclusion: Re-Inscribing histories to Redefine History.

This entire section attempts to establish why particular hermeneutic paradigms of the world and its becomings (such as the 'grand narratives' of post-colonialism or the history of the nation-state) are not to be privileged over all others, by demonstrating that the themes and directions of disparate human lives are never as deterministically bounded by any such 'dominant' horizons as these all-subsuming conceptions (Jamesonian 'third-world national allegories'; Naipaul's 'universal civilisation') might suggest. We forward instead a range of alternative reckonings that selves can make within diverse trajectories and locations that redefine how inter-actively and variously we might narrate and interpret history. At the start of his novel *Underworld*, Don DeLillo posits that "human longing on a large scale is what makes history" (1997, 3). The novels in this section expand on (and implicitly dissent with) such an assertion to demonstrate how human becomings on *every* level enter into and shape (novelistic) histories. Moreover, they also work towards contesting the "subaltern" terms in which, according to Chakrabarty, much Indian post-independence historical discourse is cast-- of "'grievously incomplete' scenarios" that detect only "lack [...], absence, or an incompleteness", because the criteria of discussion privileged in such modernist "modes of self-representation" means that "Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, represents a mimicry of a certain 'modern' subject of 'European' history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure" (1996, 239). By opening up such heterogeneous spectra of trajectories within a society's evolution, as inhabited both individually and in diverse manners of community, the novels of these two chapters articulate a wider and deeper range of "imagined communities" than any singular mode of "national allegory" can ever include, or any conceptions of an overarching "universal civilisation" could ever contain or

homogenise. How irrepressible and irreducibly varied these histories are, is what this section attempts to evaluate.

Chapter 9: Improvising Resolutions: Beyond Place and Family.

A Fine Balance: Selves Without the Nation.

In *Midnight's Children*, Shiva, the midnight's child of the streets (who might be the narrator's foster brother and a legitimate heir of his upper middle-class life), is portrayed as being the most cynical disrupter of Saleem's idea of a Midnight's Children's Conference that should commit itself with parliamentary zeal towards nation-building purposes:

What purpose, man? What thing in the whole sister-sleeping world got *reason*, yara? For what reason you're rich and I'm poor? Where's the reason in starving, man? God knows how many millions of damn fools living in this country, man, and you think there's a purpose! Man, I'll tell you---you got to get what you can, do what you can with it, and then you got to die. That's reason, rich boy. Everything else is only mother-sleeping *wind* (Rushdie, 1981, 215-16)!

During their contemporaneous adolescence, Saleem suspects him of parricide and serial murder, and even when in later life Shiva becomes a war hero and circulates in the salons of high society (by which time Saleem has been reduced to pavement life), Shiva, in his conception, never ceases to be "implacable, traitorous, my enemy from our birth" (409), who finally reveals his true potential and purpose when he is assigned by the State the task of murdering every last midnight's child. For Saleem, interpreting this lifelong rivalry is a key to gaining "an understanding of the age" (417) itself, more so because even though Shiva ensures that the reproductive parts of every midnight's child are curried and fed to the street dogs of Benares, his own numberless illegitimate children are simultaneously being born and raised everywhere, "in the boudoirs and hovels of the nation, a new generation of children, begotten by midnight's darkest child" (425).

It is the Shivas of India that Rohinton Mistry chooses to focus on in *A Fine Balance*, as representatives of the hundreds of millions of Indians for whom any idea of India as a

nation-state occurs only as harsh irony, and any aspect of national history only impinges upon their lives as violation. Discarding the possibilities for community, fraternity and continuity-despite-change that Seth and Narayan establish through the constructions of family, place, community, and class, Mistry puts together a primary cast from different classes, locations, faiths, and castes, while the rest include the most 'subaltern' of the social chain--- untouchables, slum-dwellers, a beggar-master and his variously mutilated proteges, and pavement and platform dwellers who do not officially exist because they live unrecognised existences in illegal slums (even their labour goes officially unrecorded). Mistry's method of national examination is to narrate an inter-connected spectrum of such variedly 'subaltern' "histories from below" including diverse processes and histories of violation, to see what possibilities of agency, solidarity and community emerge (endure).⁶ Where and how do the abandoned gather together, (and also) where and how do the violated violate each other? How do Indians outside state and official history "go on"?

Subaltern 'Histories from Below': Mistry's Heteroglossic National Portrait.

In Mistry's novel, even though his characters have no central (Rushdian) interpretative ambition or paranoia about "swallowing" all of India to be able to inhabit its multiplicity, they are violated repeatedly in various ways until they cannot be reduced any further without being killed. In the city, Dina's husband is killed by a reversing truck; in their village, every member of Ishvar and Om's family is set on fire because, impatient with the pace of change, they "had dared to break the timeless chain of caste, [and so] retribution was bound to be swift" (1996, 95). Years later, when they return for Om's wedding, the same "timeless" nemesis re-violates them in 'modern'

⁶ These are the lives that Aurora Zogoiby in *The Moor's Last Sigh* portrays as mere urban "jetsam" in her later paintings, and Saleem Sinai depicts through Shiva as being no more than a cynical, mercenary, nation-destroying capacity for chaos and murder. For Aurora, "[these] people's lives, under the pressure that is only felt at the bottom of a heap, had also become composite, as patched up as their homes, [...] [until] it was the people themselves who were made of rubbish, [...] collages composed of what the metropolis did not value" (Rushdie, 1994, 302).

disguise: the landlord “is a big man now in the Congress Party, they say he will become a minister in the next elections--- if the government ever decides to have elections” (520). He can now have Om castrated and Ishvar’s legs amputated with official State machinery assisting and protecting him. In Bombay Avinash is found beaten and murdered for appearing to be of an anti-national temperament in a time of national Emergency. But as Ania Loomba has cautioned, “the ‘powerful’ and the ‘powerless’ are not unitary categories”(1998, 238):

[Therefore] subaltern agency, either at the individual level or at the collective, cannot be idealised as pure opposition to the order it opposes; it works both within that order and displays its own contradictions (237). [...] Whoever our subalterns are, they are positioned simultaneously within several different discourses of power and of resistance. [...] This also means that any instance of agency, or act of rebellion can be truthfully assessed in many different ways. [...] Situating the subaltern within a multiplicity of hierarchies is not enough: we must also think about the crucial relation between these hierarchies, between different forces and discourses (239-240).

In Mistry’s novel, pavement dwellers bash each other’s heads in with bricks because “one fellow was sleeping in someone else’s spot” (1996, 155). At one point, Ibrahim, the rent collector breaks down under the pressure of being compelled to participate in the nexus of mutual exploitation:

It’s no use, [...]. I cannot do this job, I hate it! Oh, what has my life become! [...] Forgive me, sister [...]. I did not know, when I brought them, that they would do such damage. For years I have followed the landlord’s orders. Like a helpless child. He tells me to threaten somebody, I threaten. [...] I am his creature. Everybody thinks that I am an evil person, but I am not, I want to see justice done, for myself, for yourself, for everyone. But the world is controlled by wicked people, we have no chance, we have nothing but trouble and sorrow (432).

In his extremely polyglossic narrative, Mistry exposes both the limits of middle-class conceptions of the nation-state as a progressive, modernist project, as well as the actual implications of inhabiting this society at diverse subaltern (urban and rural) levels. He presents a range of views expressed by the nationally-‘conscious’ bourgeoisie who proclaim nation-building purposes and principles; for Mrs. Gupta, the declaration of national Emergency comes as “glad tidings”:

Minor irritants in her life were also being eradicated--- the Prime Minister's declaration yesterday of the Internal Emergency had incarcerated most of the parliamentary opposition, along with thousands of trade-unionists, students, and social workers. "Isn't that good news? [...] No more strikes and morchas and silly disturbances (73).

For Nusswan too, "the Emergency is good medicine for the nation" (352), and signals "a true spirit of renaissance" (371), because "poverty is being tackled head-on" by the City Beautification Programme that demolishes all its slums. He views the nation-wide programme of sterilisations as a timely measure, and all reports of compulsion as being a CIA rumour. To Nusswan, "at the best of times, democracy is a seesaw between complete chaos and tolerable confusion. [And] to make a democratic omelette, you have to break a few democratic eggs" (372). He declares that "at least two hundred million Indians are surplus to requirements" (372) and could well be eliminated, because "counting them as unemployment statistics year after year just makes the numbers look bad" (373) and besides, "people sleeping on pavements gives industry a bad name" (372). Yet Mistry's heteroglossic method--- of juxtaposing such voices amid portraying the actual implications of the various measures of Emergency upon the subaltern members of his cast--- undertakes a critique of the nation-state (and implicitly of nationalist discourses and historiography) that reveals the sheer imaginative distance as well as the violently disruptive relationships between bourgeois state-based conceptions of the national project and the numerous other histories comprising an Indian environment. Guha eloquently describes the "failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation" (Guha and Spivak, 1988, 41). But, he reminds historians:

There were vast areas in the life and consciousness of the people which were never integrated into their hegemony. [Yet] the *structural dichotomy* that arose from this [...] did not, however, mean that these two domains were hermetically sealed off from each other and there was no contact between them (41-42).

Mistry's narrative establishes that the Emergency is a constitutional ruse designed to foil constitutional principles--- the bourgeois-state's disagreements with itself that do not involve or engage these subalterns, yet invariably they pay the heaviest price. Even if

they are “surplus to requirements”, only unofficially existing, they are also the single national commodity that is freely available. In great detail, he examines the points of interaction (and inevitable violation and conflict) that arise from inhabiting these distinct yet simultaneous trajectories--- of being subalterns within the modern bourgeois nation-state. His protagonists are evicted from the slums as part of measures meant to beautify the city, and are coerced into forced labour on construction sites which the state and its middle classes consider to be development projects; into forced attendance at what a cowed media will report as being another well attended Prime-Ministerial rally; as well as into undergoing the compulsory sterilisations that will improve the national demographics. Not only does such a narrative span exceed the boundaries of “elitist” historiograph(ies) that “can do no more than equate politics with the aggregation of ideas and activities of those who were directly involved in operating these institutions” (Guha and Spivak, 1988, 40), it exposes diverse instances of what Chakrabarty has described as the “repression and violence that are as instrumental in the victory of the modern as is the persuasive power of its rhetorical strategies” (Mongia, 1996, 242). In a Foucauldian vein, Chakrabarty theorises the “progressivist” coercion that Mistry narratively demonstrates--- through the forced vasectomies, the abuse of unrecorded, unpaid labour, and the numerous evictions of slum-dwellers in the name of urban improvement:

The idea is to write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it. [...] Nowhere is this irony--- the undemocratic foundations of ‘democracy’--- more visible than in the history of modern medicine, public health, and personal hygiene, the discourses of which have been central in locating the body of the modern at the intersection of the public and the private (as defined by, and subject to negotiations with, the state). The triumph of this discourse, however, has always been dependent on the mobilisation, on its behalf, of effective means of physical coercion. I say ‘always’ because this coercion is both originary/foundational (i.e. historic) as well as pandemic and quotidian (Mongia, 1996, 242).

Yet even after discarding every conventional location or possibility of identity and solidarity (caste, religion, birthplace, family), and exploring the effects of diverse upheavals upon his characters, Mistry never ceases to inquire into the “contributions

made by people *on their own*, that is, *independent of the elite*" (Guha and Spivak, 1988, 39) towards inhabiting, developing and transforming their environments, which is also an investigation of the possibility of "acknowledging the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny" (Guha; quoted in Schwarz and Ray, 2000, 472). If the secret of survival is "to embrace change, and to adapt" (Mistry, 1996, 230), Ishvar and Om, and indeed everybody else except Maneck, do so right until the end, even though 'change' only means successive violations descending upon their lives. Ishvar is ready for further trials on any terms if they offer the remotest chance of struggle: "giving up already? That's no way to win in life. Fight and struggle, Om, even if life knocks you around" (82). With nothing in common between them (not religion, class, gender or background), they gradually (and unromantically) overcome layers of mutual suspicion, ignorance and prejudice to perform together the unlikeliest non-familial community for nearly a year, despite being threatened by different pressures at all times. Mistry manages to forge a community, brought together by circumstances of accident and violation, that holds together despite violation, before further violation nearly destroys it. Though suicide, murder, psychopathic madness, or the weak participating actively in the exploitation of the weaker are also survival alternatives adopted by other members of Mistry's cast, he discovers (through enacting the overwhelmingly violent effects of social and historical circumstances) how such continual disruption itself forces disparate selves together, and releases unexpectedly plastic (and elastic) capacities for individual re-definition and collective solidarity where either would seem impossible. Again, it is only through a comprehensive, fully immersed narrative engagement with various conflicting processes, sites, dimensions and agents involved in a society's history that Mistry examines the elasticity of his protagonists, to see what radical possibilities of community and "oppositional agency"⁷ might emerge. Examining his

⁷ We have already presented how Minu Moallem and Iain Boal theorise "oppositional agency", as a form of resistance "that is able to recognise the full range of lived experience as the ground of practical struggle and solidarity" and can "open up spaces in which identities, formed in the welter of political struggles, remain supple in repertoires, not frozen or cast in official moulds (Kaplan, Alarcon and Moallem, 1999, 259).

characters' capacities for reinvention and endurance (endurance through reinvention) are among Mistry's primary exploratory objectives. Reinvention implies the ability to assess one's location in an ever-changing environment and continually renegotiate one's terms accordingly, and to Chakrabarty, such re-inventions are what release histories:

Contradictory, plural, and heterogeneous struggles whose outcomes are never predictable, even retrospectively, in accordance with schemas that seek to naturalise and domesticate this heterogeneity. These struggles include coercion (both on behalf of and against modernity)--- physical, institutional, and symbolic violence, often dispensed with dreamy-eyed idealism, and it is this violence that plays a decisive role in the establishment of meaning, in the creation of truth regimes, in deciding [...] whose and which 'universal' wins (Mongia, 1996, 241).

And finally, each such distinctly-premised and alternatively-directed trajectory within a society's history demands of us that we read differently, compelling us to question (and even revise) our criteria for each separate narrative, rather than subsume them under pre-defined categories of what constitutes history. Barbara Christian has articulated in a related context:

It is a learning from the language of creative writers, which is one of surprise, so that I might discover what language I might use. For my language is very much based on what I read and how it affects me, that is, on the surprise that comes from reading something that compels you to read differently. [...] I, therefore, have no set method, [...] since for me every work suggests a new approach. As risky as that might seem, it is, I believe, what intelligence means--- a tuned sensitivity to that which is alive and therefore cannot be known until it is known (Mongia, 1996, 156).

Why Even 'Non-National' Narrative can Never be "Deterritorialised".

Thus we argue, through pursuing such trajectories of alternatively premised, heterogeneous historicising as Chakrabarty envisions, that what remains for him at the level of "dreams" for the historian operating "within the knowledge protocols of academic history", occur as narrative experiments performed repeatedly and diversely on the discursive terrain of the post-colonial novel (i.e. attempts "to write over the given

and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections” that have “no (infra)structural sites [...] [to] lodge themselves” (Mongia, 1996, 244)). Yet this is also the point to highlight how these novels themselves, implicitly, through the very worldedness of their engagements, caution against any utopian conceptions of liberated “deterritorialisation”. Arguing against the ‘classical realism’ that they theorise as the “root-book” as well as the more modernist book exhibiting the “radicle-system, or fascicular root”,⁸ Deleuze and Guattari forward instead a ‘rhizome’ (non-) theory of narrative that appears to express something of the irrepressible elasticity Mistry’s characters display in inhabiting their worlds:

Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and bi-univocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialisation as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. [...] Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction [...]. The rhizome is an antigenealogy [...], antimemory [...], a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits [...], an acentred, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system without a General and without an organising memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, 21).

It is upon such a conception that they base their vision of a potential “nomadology” in literature:

History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a nomadology, the opposite of a history (23). [...]

The nomads invented a war machine in opposition to the State apparatus. History has never comprehended nomadism, the book has never comprehended the outside. The State as the model for the book and for thought has a long history: logos, the philosopher-king, the transcendence of the Idea, the interiority of the concept, the republic of minds, the court of reason, the functionaries of thought, man as legislator and subject. The State’s pretension to be a world order and to root man (24).

Yet, as we have already seen in Mistry and shall continue to establish through the narrative of Michael K, no novelistic “nomadology”, no matter how ‘oppositional’ or

⁸ For the full presentation of their formulations of both these ‘book-types’, see Deleuze and Guattari (1996, 5-6).

unpredictable its trajectories, can ever exist in unrelated or disengaged opposition to the various apparatuses of official/State history. Any fictionalised 'nomadology' must inevitably negotiate the processes and violations of precisely such structures to be able to emerge as an existentially credible alternative that does not degenerate into fantasy, private escapism or a contrived theoretical transcendence unattainable to the 'actually worlded'.

Life and Times of Michael K: Crises of Representing the Subaltern.

In our studies of *Shame* (and Rushdie's portrayal of Sufiya Zinobia) and Bessie Head's *Maru* in the previous section, we have already come across how Gayatri Spivak redefines the limits of historiographic intervention and representative voicing 'on behalf' of the subaltern hitherto effaced from history:

For the (gender-unspecified) 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself. [...] The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been left traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. [...] The question becomes, how can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak (Williams and Chrisman, 1993, 80)?

Her argument takes on Foucault and Deleuze as well as many currents of Western feminist theory when they appear unproblematically to consider questions of interpreting and representing 'unmediated, authentic' voices that establish subaltern historical agency. Yet if, as she concedes--- and for the purposes of political activism, insists--- "the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation" (80), then she must work deconstructively and 'archaeologically' with the very incompleteness of this "trace structure" in a manner of historiographic representation that foregrounds its own "effacements in disclosure" (acknowledging wherever the irretrievability of voice-

consciousness compels her to, that “there [remains] no itinerary we can trace here” (98). Thus:

When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important. [...] This can be a description of ‘investigating, identifying, and measuring [...] the *deviation* from an ideal that is irreducibly differential’. [...] The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. [...] Subaltern historiography must confront the impossibility of such gestures (82).

Coetzee’s novel works as another instance of precisely such self-aware problematic historicising, not only in how it examines questions of the possibility of subaltern agency in the midst of inhabiting overwhelmingly antagonistic State-directed history, but because it furthers Mistry’s portrayal by confronting within the same narrative the crises of interpreting and representing such agency in appropriate historiography, *both* for a non-subaltern (sympathetic) chronicler as well as for the subaltern subject himself. The intrigued camp-doctor unleashes image after image upon K in attempting to understand his enigmatic choices:

He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly from hand to hand. A hard little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life. He passes through these institutions and camps and hospitals and God knows what else like a stone. Through the intestines of the war. An unbearing, unborn creature. I cannot really think of him as a man (1983, 185).

Elsewhere in a mental letter to K the doctor decides that he now resembles a stick insect.

You are like a stick insect, Michaels, whose sole defence against the universe of predators is its bizarre shape. You are like a stick insect that has landed, God knows how, in the middle of a great wide flat bare concrete plain. You raise your slow fragile stick-legs one at a time, you inch about looking for something to merge with, and there is nothing. Why did you ever leave the bushes, Michaels (204-205)?

The ironies, as well as the ‘interpreter’s’ potential for violence and distortion, as he vainly attempts to fill his incomprehension, are evident. How can a life appear so free of

its times; how can a being locate himself at such an apparent remove while immersed in his world's (insistent and violent) demands and enforced becomings? Despite being easily the most sympathetic and interested government official in the camp, the doctor can only find terms that are non-human and passive to be able to express his sense of what K stands for or is 'doing'. He confesses to himself and tries to convince his colleagues that "K is not wholly of [their] world" (178). Yet, rather than admit his interpretative incompetence and K's inexpressibility within the terms he wishes to impose upon him, the doctor in increasing desperation bombards K's silence with formulations, casting him always in images outside of humanity, historicity, growth and will. K's intransigent silence annoys him, because it appears to be arrogance that someone in his position should have no right to: "who is he, after all? [...] A mouse who quit an overcrowded, foundering ship. Only, being a city mouse, he did not know how to live off the land and began to grow very hungry indeed. And then was lucky enough to be sighted and hauled aboard again" (187). The same doctor/historian who protects K from the impatience and suspicion of the rest of the camp unrelentingly presses him to speak: "you've got a story to tell and we want to hear it. Start anywhere. Tell us about your mother. Tell us about your father. Tell us your views on life" (191-192). Once K responds to a long harangue by replying that he is not in the war. This enrages the doctor. "Of course you are in the war, man, whether you like it or not" (189):

You should have hidden, Michaels. You were too careless of yourself. [...] Did you think you were a spirit invisible, a visitor on our planet, a creature beyond the laws of nations? Well, the laws of nations have you in their grip now: they have pinned you down [...], they will grind you in the dirt if necessary. [...] The laws are made of iron, Michaels [...]. No matter how thin you make yourself, they will not relax. There is no home left for universal souls, except perhaps in Antarctica or on the high seas (206-207).

Yet ultimately it is the doctor who goes mad (while being stoned by children, he still pleads with K for a sign, "persecutor, madman, bloodhound, policeman" (229) and acolyte all at once), from being unable to decide whether after all K is "nothing, no story of the slightest interest to rational people" (194), or if he is indeed "so obscure

as to be a prodigy" (195) that only the doctor can save, and ever commemorate (and even celebrate) in narrative:

Listen to me, Michaels. I am the only one who can save you. I am the only one who sees you for the original soul you are. [...] I alone see you as [...] a human soul above and beneath classification, a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history [...]. You are precious, [...] you are the last of your kind [...]. We have all tumbled over the lip into the cauldron of history: only you [...] have managed to live in the old way, drifting through time, observing the seasons, no more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does. We ought to value you and celebrate you [...]. But that is not the way it is going to be. The truth is that you are going to perish in obscurity [...], and no one is going to remember you but I, unless you yield and at last open your mouth (207-208).

Resisting Hegemony, and Subaltern Self-Fashioning.

But as this study has argued throughout, not the novel nor the world can ever be a home for "universal souls", because no being is exempt from thorough existential immersion. Yet if there is to be an interpretative alternative between the doctor's impossible idealisations of K having radically (and actively) eluded the demands of history, and the simultaneous denigrations of him as passive, child-like, even non-human, Coetzee establishes that such formulation will have to evolve gradually from within K himself, from out of the inter-related processes of inhabiting and simultaneously interpreting his own trajectory in the world. Only K, and even then by degrees, can convert into a distinct historiography his unique approach to inhabiting history.

Early in the novel, it seems to K that his mother must embody his life's purpose. But after his mother dies he finds he does not miss her, "except insofar as he had missed her all his life" (46). The clearest evidence that K is neither 'pre-historically' static nor passive, and further, not incapable of self-articulation, is that he struggles throughout the narrative trying to situate himself and direct his own becomings towards those places and conditions within his world where he thinks he will be happy. What is

unique about him is that he gradually comes to discover he will settle for nothing else. His manner of “oppositional agency” will not be a continual Mistrian expanding of self-elasticity that attempts thereby to contain and endure violation; on the contrary he will resolutely keep moving and reduce himself until he arrives upon exactly the patch of earth he is seeking. One of his favourite self- formulations is that he is “a gardener, because that is [his] nature” (81). Living off an abandoned farm is not thieving, because “it is God’s earth” (53). But this self-image is not invulnerable, nor is his sense of God’s earth otherworldly. For a while he tells himself the reason he gardens is that “enough men had gone off to war saying the time for gardening was when the war was over; whereas there must be men to stay behind and keep the gardening alive [...], because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children” (150). But this purpose, once stated, is found to be too simple, and immediately unsatisfactory.

Between this reason and the truth that he would never announce himself, however, lay a gap wider than the distance separating him from the firelight. Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. [...] His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong (150-151).

Coetzee’s characters always awarely inhabit opacities, within themselves as much as in their interpretations of their world. But opacity is never understood to be static or a vacuum; nor does it arise from the lack of interpretative effort. Michael K. is far from longing not to be. He has a vision of paradise that is very much of this earth, and is even momentarily attainable. When he achieves it alone in the veld while waiting for his seeds to sprout, and “time pour[s] out upon him in an unending stream” (139), K. learns to “love [this] idleness”. Yet this is the closest K. will get to inviolability and absolute harmony. The narrative cannot stop here, because the world has more becomings to force upon him yet. The doctor is right to remind him that there is no room for “universal souls” anywhere. K. is transported back to prison camp as a

guerilla because there is nothing else he can be doing alone in the mountains, within the interpretative frame of reference of a state pursuing war against its own citizens.

In Coetzee's narrative, K's growth lies in his coming to articulate his own uncompromising resistance to the world even as it increasingly imposes itself on him--- this includes redefining the spaces (and times) where he momentarily achieves happiness and harmony, because none of them are ever outside of history. He realises that perhaps he is becoming "a different kind of man, [...] if there are two kinds of man": he is "becoming smaller and harder and drier everyday" (93). Further, K. comes to see how he resents being thought of as a "body servant", "someone's creature" (146), so much that he leaves the peace of the farm behind to be alone again. While there he has not used the farmhouse or any of its machinery usefully, because he knows it is not the way of life he wants to prolong. He does not build himself anything permanent to dwell in, nor does he fence off his crops. He is entirely aware of the reasons he will not work in a camp or accept its food, even if he will not answer any of the doctor's questions about it (which is what leads to him being labelled a "stick insect", a "stone", and a "man of earth"). The doctor realises that he "just doesn't like the food here, profoundly does not like it", that "maybe he only eats the bread of freedom" (200). From this follows his insistence that K is not of "our world". Yet this is proven to be entirely inaccurate: K loves the earth, but only on his own terms. And it is here that Coetzee locates the originality of his opposition--- in the terms which K defines the limits and direction of his own being-in-the-world: which of the world's violations he has to endure and what he can refuse, and what his irreducible 'standards' are, irreducible because he has decided so.⁹ Coetzee establishes again and again his unvoiced capacity for self-assessment that never leaves history out of account:

⁹ This is his great difference from Bessie Head's Margaret Cadmore (in *Maru*) and Rushdie's portrayal of Sufiya Zinobia, who are shown to become the mere passive 'grounds' (as Lata Mani, Spivak, or Rajeshwari Sundar-Rajan would put it) cross-traversed by various conflicts and discourses, whereas any acts of creative or resistive agency are always initiated by others. When Sufiya acts, it is only to commit mass murder.

Parasite was the word the police captain had used [...]. Yet to K [...], it was no longer obvious which was host and which parasite, camp or town. [...] What if there were millions, more millions than anyone knew, living in camps, living off alms, living off the land, living by guile, creeping away in corners to escape the times, too canny to put out flags and draw attention to themselves to be counted? What if the hosts were far outnumbered by the parasites, the parasites of idleness and the other secret parasites of the police force and the schools and factories and offices, the parasites of the heart? Could the parasites then still be called parasites? [...] Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest (159-160).

For all K's awareness of the vacuums in self-comprehension that he cannot adequately fill with language, his resistance to what he will not accept could not be more articulate (or active):

At least I have not been clever, and come back to Sea Point full of stories of how they beat me in the camps till I was thin as a rake and simple in the head. I was mute and stupid in the beginning, I will be mute and stupid at the end. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being simple. [...] Perhaps the truth is that it is enough to be out of the camps, out of all the camps at the same time. Perhaps that is enough of an achievement, for the time being. How many people are there left who are neither locked up nor standing guard at the gate? I have escaped the camps; perhaps, if I lie low, I will escape the charity too (248-249).

Only after (and amidst) thoroughly inhabiting some of the worst violations of his society's history, has he decided which elements within it will not entirely determine his own choices. He clearly acknowledges the price:

I want to live here forever [...]. It is as simple as that. What a pity that to live in times like these a man must be ready to live like a beast. [...] He must live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living. That is what it has come to (135).

Thus K refuses both his role as well as the dominant definition of itself that his society wishes to impose upon him. The doctor thinks of him as an "escape artist" and an "allegory", of "how scandalously, how outrageously, a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it" (228). But there is nothing transcendental about K's trajectory or his self-conception: it is the same piece of earth he returns to where the army captured him before, and then mined so that no 'guerilla' could ever grow provisions on it again. On his earth, "war [remains] the father of all and king of all" (1) and K's free hours are numbered.

As with Mistry's protagonists, Coetzee's narrative enacts through K's development one of the primary objectives of subaltern historiography--- by establishing that K's agency and activity are neither to be dismissed as pre-politically naïve or merely unconscious and 'backward'. Dipesh Chakrabarty has written of Ranajit Guha's similar objectives and achievements:

Guha's separation of elite and subaltern domains of the political, had some radical implications for social theory and historiography. The standard tendency in global Marxist historiography until the seventies was to look on peasant revolts organised along the axes of kinship, religion, caste etc. as movements exhibiting a 'backward' consciousness, the kind that Hobsbawm [...] has called 'pre-political'. This was seen as a consciousness that had not quite come to terms with the institutional logic of modernity or capitalism. [...] By explicitly rejecting the characterisation of peasant consciousness as pre-political and by avoiding evolutionary models of 'consciousness', Guha was prepared to suggest that the nature of collective action against exploitation in colonial India was such that it effectively stretched the imaginary boundaries of the category 'political' far beyond the territories assigned to it in European political thought (Schwarz and Ray, 2000, 473).¹⁰

Further, the novel demonstrates why a narrative "nomadology" can never base itself on a radically exclusive refusal to engage with the processes and mechanisms of State history, by performing the ways in which K's 'nomadic' trajectory, no matter how resolute, is always inextricable from the violations unleashed by the State he inhabits. Ania Loomba proposes an inclusive narrative approach more akin to the manner of 'worlded' engagements that Mistry and Coetzee demonstrate through their novelistic performances, than a Deleuzian "post-foundational nomadology" allows for:

Situating the subaltern within a multiplicity of hierarchies is not enough: we must also think about the crucial relations between these hierarchies, *between* different forces and discourses. [...] While many critics believe that post-modern ideas of multiplicity and fragmentation make the standpoint of marginalised historical subjects visible, others argue that post-modernism carries these ideas to the extreme so that we cannot understand historical dynamics at all.

¹⁰ For instance, another semi-human, 'primitive' and 'pre-historic' image the doctor tries to contain K within is that of a "genuine little man of earth", made when "someone scuffled together a handful of dust, spat on it, and patted it together into the shape of a rudimentary man" (220). K is the "kind of little man one sees in peasant art emerging from the world from between the squat thighs of its mother-host with fingers ready hooked and back ready bent for a life of burrowing, a creature that spends its waking life stooped over the soil, [...] while unnoticed as ever somewhere far away the grinding of the wheels of history continues" (220).

It is possible to make the case for a more productive synthesis here: we can abandon the grand narratives which once dominated the writing of history without also abandoning all analysis of the *relationships* between different forces in society [...] [which] should not be thought of as different elements, a multiplicity of narratives that we can choose between. Their full force is uncovered only by locating their articulation with each other and with other social forces. [...] Thus, in order to listen for subaltern voices we need to uncover the multiplicity of narratives that were hidden by the grand narratives, but we still need to think about how the former are woven together (1998, 240-241).

The Beginnings of 'Nation Re-building': *Anthills of the Savannah*.

We have already come across Kwame Appiah's argument based on which he would characterise fictions such as Coetzee's (and Mistry's) as novels of the "second stage" of post-colonial writing, that are to be read as exercises in "delegitimation" "rejecting the Western *imperium*, it is true; but also rejecting the nationalist project of the post-colonial bourgeoisie" (1992, 246):

Africa's postcolonial novelists--- novelists anxious to escape neocolonialism--- are no longer committed to the nation; and in this they will seem, as I have suggested, misleadingly postmodern. But what they have chosen instead of the nation is not an older traditionalism but Africa--- the continent and its people (246). [...] Postcoloniality [...] is also a *post* that challenges earlier legitimating narratives. And it challenges them in the name of the suffering victims of 'more than thirty republics'. But it challenges them in the name of the ethical universal; in the name of humanism [...]. And on that ground it is not an ally for Western postmodernism but an agonist: from which I believe postmodernism may have something to learn (250).¹¹

In a similar vein, Donald Pease defines a "postnational" narrative practice and articulates the basis of its difference from the now-discredited narratives of decolonising nationalism:

¹¹ As with Spivak's frequent discussion of the limits that must necessarily qualify the work of Foucault, Deleuze, Kristeva and other Western theorists when applied to non-Western histories and conditions, Appiah points out why post-colonial 'post-nationalism' cannot base itself on Western postmodernist premises. It is beyond our present scope to enter into the full implications of this argument, but for his exposition see Appiah (1992), especially pp 240-250.

Surrogate abjection and unanimous violence have accompanied the wholesale delinkages of 'national peoples' from the imagined communities in which they had previously 'experienced' their imagined wholeness. The loss of national narrativity as an imaginative cushion has released the unmitigated force of the state's repressive apparatus as a collectively shared experience. [...] The postnational might be understood as having opened up the gap within national narratives--- in between state power and how to make sense of it--- that national narrativity had covered over. This disruption has violated the belief in their timelessness that national narratives had previously solicited. It has also revealed the relation between the nation and its subjects as indistinguishable from the brute show of state force (O' Donnell, Spring '97, 8).

Pease then adapts a Bhabhan conception of 'performative' national narration to post-colonial contexts:

[Postnationalism] names the site in-between the nation and the state that is traversed by these multiple and heterogeneous acts of narration. These narrative activities inscribe 'national peoples' within a space that is neither organic nor contractual, neither the origin nor the end of the nation, but in-between the national and these different acts of narration (3). [...] They have instead materialised the postnational as the internal boundary insisting at the site where stateless individuals have not yet consented to state power and the state has not yet integrated the stateless into its national order (8).

In these two chapters we have attempted to establish how, despite always acknowledging the immersions of their characters within the overwhelming imperatives and upheavals of their societies, various novels have nevertheless articulated several credible trajectories and possibilities of creative coexistence, agency, and solidarity, the value of which lies in their irreducible heterogeneity. While such re-inscribing of histories might be considered 'optimistic' in itself, it would be futile to deny, as narratives such as Mistry's, Seth's and Coetzee's themselves acknowledge, that despite all such evidence of diverse human irrepressibility on individual and collective levels, neither the history unleashed by the nation-state nor the implications of its violations appear to be in any danger of disappearing. For almost all of Africa and India, the nation-state (however 'failed' it might be in numerous instances) remains the pre-dominant political premise and structural paradigm upon which to forge and inhabit any large-scale collective existence. And therefore it would imply ending the chapter (and

this study) on a very pessimistic note, if we did not include a single fiction that actually attempted to reconcile the heterogeneity we have uncovered with the continuing presence of the nation-state. We would in effect be affirming the impossibility of negotiating any form of enabling co-existence of such histories within a statist framework; and that the state and its governing elite must always exist in an antagonistic, repressive relationship with the irreducible capacities for “oppositional agency” within its population; and further, that only individual and inter-personal improvised ‘survivals’ or small-scale ‘non-governmental’ premises for collective existence (e.g. Narayan’s *Malgudi*, Seth’s families, shared ethnicity in Achebe’s early fiction) are possible in any creative sense in Africa and India. Yet there do exist instances of nation-‘rebuilding’ fictions (or ‘post-national’ novels in the sense defined by Appiah and Pease) where these structural divisions are identified, and deeper, more inclusive experimental performances of a shared national becoming are attempted.

Dismantling Individual Elitism.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, watching the gathering at a public execution jubilantly jeer at the condemned men on their way to death, Ikem feels his “tenuous links” with the crowd “snap totally at that point” (Achebe, 1988, 42): “I knew then that if its own mother was at that moment held up by her legs and torn down the middle like a piece of old rag that crowd would have yelled with eye-watering laughter” (42). But instead of simply remaining another fictionalised instance of an intellectual’s slightly overawed disgust at any rare occasion of proximity with “the people”, Ikem in the course of Achebe’s narrative develops from being a self-regarding editor who considers his newspaper work to be “crusading”, to wondering persistently and self-reflexively “how to connect his essence with earth and earth’s people [...] with integrity” (141). While these terms remain obviously sentimental and patronising, Ikem realises how

incongruous and limited his youthful idea of entering “public affairs” to be a ‘nation-builder’ had been:

But his participation in these affairs had yielded him nothing but disenchantment and a final realisation of the very term ‘public’ as applied to those affairs shrouded as they are in the mist of unreality and floating above and away from the lives and concerns of ninety-nine percent of the population. Public affairs! They are nothing but the closed transactions of soldiers-turned-politicians, with their cohorts in business and the bureaucracy (141).

His “most poignant” journalistic work now seems “to take on the vaporous haze of a mirage”, as does the hypocrisy of the elite, including the conscientious elite, for “invoking the people’s name in whatever [they] do”, while at the same time making sure of their absence, “knowing that if they were to appear in person, their scarecrow presence confronting our pious invocations would render our words too obscene even for sensibilities as robust as ours” (141).

After a comprehensive assessment of the state’s record of abandonment and exploitation of its citizens, Ikem diagnoses “the prime failure of this government” as being “the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country” (141), and dismisses his earlier despair as premature, because only “naïve romantics” could have believed that the core of the nation’s being is in “perfect health” (141):

How could it be? Sapped by regimes of parasites, ignorant of so many basic things though it does know of some others; crippled above all by this perverse kindness towards oppression conducted with panache! How could it be in perfect health? Impossible (141-142).

This disavowal of a facile Armahesque disillusionment at the absence of ‘spontaneous’ and sustained social transformation is developed further by a consideration of the limits of self-reconstructing open to someone of his class and upbringing, even with a newly expanded consciousness such as his:

What about renouncing my own experience, needs and knowledge. But could I? And should I? I could renounce needs perhaps, but experience and knowledge, how? There seems no way I can become like the poor except by faking. [...] So for good or ill I shall remain myself, but with this deliberate readiness now to help and be helped. Like those complex multi-valent atoms [...] I have arms that reach out in all directions--- a helping hand, a hand signalling for help (142).¹²

Among the re-orientated Ikem's actions, before his murder by the State, are an unsparing excoriation of the University student body for their self-serving illusions and duplicities, and a reminder to them that they have no authority, moral, legal or empirical, to claim to speak for "peasants and workers": "no, you are not a peasant, my good friend. Sit down. I want a proper peasant [...]. Well, ladies and gentlemen it does appear we have no proper peasants here tonight. Perhaps they don't even know we are having this meeting" (156).

He himself apologetically gives up this right of voice as far as the role of subalterns and women in any transformatory social movement is concerned, and confesses his presumption and ignorance. Most of all, he recognises, and continually affirms to the students, how "piecemeal, slow and undramatic" (99), any widespread change would inevitably have to be:

The sweeping, majestic visions of people rising victorious [...] against their oppressors and transforming their world with theories and slogans, [...] are at best grand illusions. The rising, conquering tide, yes; but the millennium afterwards, no! New oppressors will have been readying themselves secretly in the undertow long before the tidal wave got really going. [...] Revolution may be necessary for taking a society out of an intractable quagmire but it does not confer freedom, and may indeed hinder it (99).

Ikem's friend Chris, who had carved out for himself a niche of supercilious and weary resignation in the heart of the dictator's Cabinet, is shaken enough by his murder to

¹² For comparable critiques, see Neil Lazarus's reflections on the potential (and crucial) interventionary role of the intellectual in post-colonial national history (Barker, Hulme, and Iversen, 1994, 197-220) as well as his study of Armah (1990), especially Chapters 1 and 2.

retreat into the provinces, where, apart from his discovery of the countryside for the first time in his life, he undertakes a short-lived attempt to organise a new centre of resistance. Yet Achebe makes clear that his own senseless, anonymous killing could only be interpreted pessimistically within the evaluative standards of what Neil Lazarus has termed a “literature of disillusionment”. Throughout his narrative interrogation of Kangan society, Achebe never denies its frequently eruptive capacities at various levels for violence and disorder, but unlike *A Man of the People*, or Armah’s work or Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, this is not presented as a final confirmation of the futility of all transformatory possibilities. Ikem and Chris were only beginning to conceive gigantic tasks: how can results be expected from work that has not even begun yet? Ikem challenges the students:

Now tell me, can anything be more elitist, more *offensively* elitist, than someone presuming to answer questions that have not even been raised? No I cannot give you the answer you are clamouring for. Go home and think! I cannot decree your pet, text-book revolution (158).

Creativity and Agency in Everyday Life.

But it would remain a limited conception of an alternative national society that examined the possibilities for transformation only among the educated and political elite. Achebe’s social vision traces the beginnings of more creative, participatory endeavour at numerous other locations--- rural and urban, traditional and modern--- outside the governing and interpreting class, to a much greater extent than his earlier work. At various points his principal characters notice, as if for the first time, the resourcefulness and “the vitality and thrill” (47) of ongoing life around them:

Now, as the overwhelming force of this simple, always-taken-in-vain reality impinged on each of Chris’ five, or was it six, senses, [...] the ensuing knowledge seeped through every pore in his skin into the core of his being continuing the transformation, already in process, of the man he was (204).

For instance, Chris's growing awareness of his ignorance--- of the multiplicity, vitality and irrepressibly creative agency evident everywhere in the daily life around him--- comes to focus on the construction and vivid decoration of the country's buses that have been assembled from minimal resources:

That imaginative roadside welder who created the first crude buses might be the managing director of the transport company that now had a fleet of *Luxuriouses*! If there had been no progress in the nation's affairs at the top there clearly had been some near the bottom, albeit undirected and therefore only half-realised. [...]

The sign-writers of Kangan did not work in dark and holy seclusions of monasteries but in free-for-all market-places under the fiery eye of the sun. And yet in ways not unlike the monks they sought in their work to capture the past as well as invent a future. [...]

Chris, now fully reconciled to his new condition as a wide-eyed newcomer to the ways of Kangan made a mental note of these inscriptions (201).

But there is also more organised and self-aware evidence of constructive social consciousness articulated at different levels and sites of Kangan life. The taxi-driver's union and the university student party are both multi-ethnic institutions (something conspicuously absent in Achebe's earlier envisionings of Nigeria) that look upon Ikem as having inspired and spoken for them, and protest, however futilely, the official version of his murder. Further, there is the extraordinary instance of the delegation from Abazon that journeys to the capital to meet the President. Achebe portrays their confusion within the new political order, where as usual they try to orient themselves by applying their own proverbs and philosophy to the transformed structures of power within the nation-state: "it is the place of the poor man to make a visit to the rich man who holds the yam and the knife" (127). Yet their very decision to make their presence felt in the capital is an act that moves beyond the status quo of accepting and enduring their perennial abandonment. In an explicitly different vein from the kin-and-village oriented (and often unscrupulous-where-necessary) developmental pioneerism advocated by the Umuofia Progressive Union in *No Longer at Ease*, the old Abazonian proclaims pride in their outspoken kinsman Ikem for being their "eye and ear" in the

capital, not because it brings them material benefits (quite the opposite; it attracts the rancour of the President), but because Ikem's outspoken editorials are important to the *whole* of the country:

But leave this young man alone to do what he is doing for Abazon and for the whole of Kangan; the cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household but his voice is the property of the neighbourhood. You should be proud that this bright cockerel that wakes the whole village comes from your compound (122).

His declaration ends with a musing on the possibly futile imperative to make their voices heard: "my people, that is all we are doing now. Struggling. Perhaps to no purpose except that those who come after us will be able to say: *True, our fathers were defeated but they tried*" (128). Achebe thus performs through the old man and the delegation the possibilities of re-formulating both Abazon's ethnically-premised 'traditional' identities as well as their pre-colonial values and world-views towards entering a modern political framework for purposes more constructive than ensuring their share of the "national cake". Even though the mission fails in its purpose, he examines the extent to which it is possible to articulate adequate interpretations of the dynamics of a modernising society based upon a grounding in 'traditional' modes of thought, and establishes that a community consciousness thus conceived might be re-orientated and mobilised constructively into an identity platform to demand progressive changes on behalf of an entire national society. Going along with Cabral and Fanon (and Ngugi's similar expedition in *Petals of Blood*), Basil Davidson argues that "the struggle for [...] liberation in these circumstances, closing the gap between the few and the many, building a new consciousness of united community, becomes a *determinant of culture* as well as a liberating force (1994, 260).

Yet no 'postnational' social re-building is ultimately achieved in the world of Achebe's novel: i.e. scenarios in which the State has moved from being autocratic "directors" of

national society to its “facilitators”, in Appiah’s words, “mobilising and enabling social allegiances that are largely autonomous” (1992, 274). Indeed, in its narrative detail, the novel never ceases to stress the numerous, entrenched social, systematic and attitudinal obstacles on diverse levels that undermine any effort in such directions, thus continually asking but unable to answer Beatrice’s question: “what must a people do to appease an embittered history” (220). Cut short by their premature murders, the self-redefining of the novel’s intellectuals remains bound within its self-glorifying limits, and there are as yet no pervasively disseminated mobilising forces or ideologies that can organise and direct the vitality (and desire for change) evident within the population towards any lasting structural transformations. The novel exposes the “public affairs” of Kangan for their extraordinary irrelevance and ‘thinness’ when the personality clashes and private histories of three schoolmates takes over the history of the country. Chris’ dying joke (about being the last of the “green bottles” that ruled the country), remains another symbolic possibility the narrative offers but cannot yet affirm the realisation of: the conviction that “this world belongs to the people of the world, not to any little caucus, no matter how talented” (232).

Re-Constructing the Nation: Reconceived Possibilities and their Limits.

Achebe’s narrative situates itself within a world still ruled by a repressive, dictatorial regime, that employs (and maintains in terrified sycophancy) an alienated, cynical bureaucracy composed of some of the country’s brightest young men for the daily running of state affairs, thus “revealing a more or less total alienation of governors from governed, intellectually and morally, and in all the customary attachments of everyday life” (Davidson, 1994, 249).¹³ Neil Ten Kortenaar argues that “Achebe’s

¹³ Historians such as Basil Davidson and Kwame Appiah have argued that the sources of such endemic post-colonial autocracy (and all the consequences of structurally entrenched exploitation and alienation) can be traced to the perpetuated inheritance of “autocratic centralism which had characterised the colonial state” (Davidson, 1994, 248). For their accounts of such a perspective see Davidson (1994, 248-250) and Appiah (1992, 264-266)

(re-)invention of the nation state requires that he close two circles: the circle joining the national elite and the masses (which he initiates through Chris, Ikem and Beatrice), and another that joins the traditional participatory community of Abazon with the mass society of Kangan” (Irele, Fall ’93, 65). These then are the simultaneous premises of the experimental performance the novel attempts. First of all, it examines the extent to which in Kangan, as Appiah has put it:

[Everyday] life was not a brutish war of all against all. Life went on. Not only did people not ‘get away with murder’. Even though the police would usually not have been in a position to do anything about it if they did, but people made deals, bought and sold goods, owned houses, married, raised families (1992, 273).

Secondly, along with thinkers such as Appiah and Davidson (and moving in a different direction from his own earlier novels that focus on the disruptive, unscrupulous and ‘anti-nationalist’ mobilisations of ethnic and regional identity within a multi-ethnic society), Achebe in *Anthills...* investigates the viability of creatively participating in contemporary social and political life “through the shared and intelligible norms that grew out of the responses of pre-colonial cultures to their engagement with European imperialism” (Appiah, 1992, 273), as an alternative paradigm to repressive, centralised State government. This later novel is ‘post-nationalist’ not only in the sense that it attempts to deconstruct the convictions that underlie both the attitudes and the structures within which (even) Kangan’s (conscientious) elite shuts itself off from any wider social contact, but also in how it moves beyond the earlier ‘nation-building’ conviction (widely held by the first wave of decolonising parties and leaders) that “the ancestral model could no longer work, while suggesting, at the same time, that the European model was the substitute which could meet those very problems of the ‘modern world’ against which the ancestral charters struggled in vain” (Davidson, 1994, 258). But if, as Davidson argues, “no one now disputes the centrality of popular participation and the

human factor as the only viable development paradigm for Africa", Achebe's narrative, in various rural and urban settings, and 'traditional' as well as modern modes of gathering, explores the possibility of the restoration of democratic participation at different levels of social life. Especially in the Abazonian decision to send a delegation to the capital, Achebe enacts a re-articulation of identity that is shown to evolve enablingly as part of "a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces" (Appiah, 1992, 289). This is possibly the novel's most significant post-Statist experiment--- its attempts to examine the possibilities of re-structuring the autocratic, alienated governing apparatus inherited and perpetuated by the first generations of African nation-builders through a non-nostalgic re-negotiation with pre-colonial forms of community, thus performing the rehistoricising endeavour that Davidson has described as being already underway in various African societies:

Moving beyond this nation-state can only be a gradual process; and this process will need to draw whatever encouragement it can from Africa's own experience. [...] Not of course with any idea of returning to the past, but looking to those principles and attitudes and moralities of power control, and of power sharing in community, that proved repeatedly valuable wherever they were applied, or left failure behind them wherever they were not (1994, 289).¹⁴

Conclusion: Challenging, or Expanding, National Discussion.

The method of this section has continued to be one of locating narratives on an exploratory spectrum, to be able to examine and compare a range of sites, trajectories and novelistic treatments without subsuming them under the same categories. But the exploratory route that all of these works undertake in common is a comprehensive engagement with the processes and circumstances of their particular worlds, because no establishment of heterogeneously premised human trajectories would be credible without having passed through such thoroughly 'worlded' existential examination.

¹⁴ For another narrative that performs how a newly conceived society attempts to find its form on various levels, from the interpersonal to the parliamentary, and encompasses unresolved conflicts of race, class, gender etc. simultaneously and interactively, see Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me* (1994), set in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Also, we have seen how none of the novels establish any capacities for resolution as either universal or final; neither can they claim radical alterity in any Deleuzian 'nomadological' sense that refuses to engage with the implications of inhabiting the often-imposed hegemony of the nation-state.

Yet we have argued that each of these narratives is premised upon original existential and hermeneutic strategies; alternatively formulated criteria through which the relations between selves in particular worlds are appraised, and their circumstances are then negotiated, endured, and/or resisted with extraordinary ingenuity. Such heterogeneous histories (and modes of historicising) are impossible to contain within any single teleology of the nation-state, or indeed other all-encompassing conceptions such as a Naipaulian 'universal civilisation' or Jameson's 'third-world national allegories'. As Ranajit Guha affirms, one motive behind exploring such alternatives, for novelists as much as for historians and theorists, has been precisely the disenchantment with such ultimately hegemonic historical (and historiographic) models in their applications to the diverse conditions of post-colonial societies. Though Chakrabarty reminds us that the "equating of a certain version of Europe with 'modernity' is not the work of Europeans alone; third world nationalisms, as modernising ideologies *par excellence*, have been equal partners in the process" (Mongia, 1996, 242),¹⁵ numerous later critics have noted that in Africa (and India) "the narrative of liberation that saw as its task the realisation of the truths of the nation in the face of colonialist disfigurement has given way to a narrative that challenges the nation and the identity wrought by independence" (Irele, Winter '90, 86). In the same article Edna Aizenberg goes on to ask if "the novel

¹⁵ For instance, Kadiatu Kanneh points out a curiosity in the writings of a liberation theorist such as Fanon, that for someone who deconstructs so thoroughly words such as "revolution", "liberation", and "the people", there is a certain unquestioning acceptance of the sign of "nation" (1998, 91). Fanon assumes that the term has some pre-defined stability readily comprehensible and translatable to Algeria, and moreover that with education and the development of political consciousness, a 'nation' is 'naturally' what modern independent Algerian society will cohere to be. No other paradigm for a collectively inhabited modernity is even considered. This is the mode of post-colonial nationalism (also common to leaders such as Nehru, Nkrumah, Kenyatta and others) that leads to Chakrabarty's

now combats the very thing it once sought to create".¹⁶ The techniques of earlier "national romances" will no longer suffice, in which "centralisation of authorship accorded well with the optimal national programme of self-improvement and unity to be carried out by great individuals": authorship must now capture the "heterogeneity and rough-hewnness of its world" (Irele, Winter '90, 93-94).

Of course any degree of engagement with (most) post-colonial histories would have to take into narrative account the numerous instances of what Pease has described as the "surrogate abjection and unanimous violence [that] have accompanied the wholesale delinkages of national peoples from the imagined communities in which they had previously 'experienced' their imagined wholeness" (O'Donnell, Spring '97, 8). If 'nationality' then has failed to preserve any distinction between "subjectivity and subjection" (O'Donnell, Spring '97, 8), then all such heterogeneous historicising forms part of the search for less coercive possibilities of solidarity that can effectively endure and resist the transitions and violations of a society's history. If achieving the nation-state is understood as an attained (Hegelian) acme of European, and decolonised non-Western, modernity, then articulating diverse versions of such 'post-nationalism' as we have examined forms part of post-coloniality's indigenously conceived subsequent project. But this search for 'post-nationalist' re-articulations should not be thought of as merely reactive, that sets out only to "redress" a felt "lack" or "incompleteness" of histories that find themselves inadequate in terms of certain criteria by which Western political paradigms interpret 'becoming-in-history' (i.e. citizenship and modernity as achieved through the nation-state). Such recasting is active

conclusion about how decolonisation narratives actually become 'subaltern' themselves to the master narrative of European modernity.

¹⁶ For instance, in Ngugi's fictional techniques of "flashbacks, multiple narrative voices, movement in time and space and parallel biographies and stories", she reads efforts to "plumb the incoherence" of the 'Kenyan' nation (Irele, Winter '90, 89-90). As Simon Gikandi notes of similarly utilised heteroglossia in *Anthills of the Savannah* (Irele, Fall '93, 49), these novelists uncover a "crisis of meaning" in which the "power to narrate is dispersed, and discourse is disseminated", which he interprets as a challenge to the paradigm of centralised State authority.

in its re-inscriptions, in how it “effectively stretches the imaginary boundaries of the category ‘political’ far beyond the territories assigned to it in European political thought” (Schwarz and Ray, 2000, 473). For instance, as Chakrabarty goes on to point out about the achievements of ‘subaltern studies’:

In rejecting the category ‘pre-political’, [...] Guha insists on the specific differences in the histories of power in colonial India and in Europe. This gesture is radical in that it fundamentally pluralises the history of power in global modernity (Schwarz and Ray, 2000, 475).

This section has introduced an understanding of the ways in which African and Indian novels have successfully split, challenged, expanded and thereby redefined the ‘national’ sign. In so doing, the post-colonial novel has been able to extend the range of existential discussion the form is capable of, always by re-utilising its uniquely flexible capacities for inscribing diverse histories and evoking their specific fullness. In such fiction, neither the novel nor the nation is accepted as a pre-defined matrix: the novel performs inter-related experiments of form, focus, and means in each “attempt to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections [...] so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous” (Mongia, 1996, 244).

Section 5: Conclusion: The Worlds Within Texts.

Edward Said has devoted a large part of his critical career to articulating a dichotomy that he finds to be an influential premise (or a tendency, an unchallenged assumption) in much contemporary theory and criticism. It is the same divide--- between the activities of reading texts and undertaking a comprehensive interrogation of various aspects of being-in-the-world as being somehow separate--- that we pointed towards at the beginning of this study and promised to address implicitly through its very performance, by demonstrating that a 'literary' study in no way excludes an examination of the world the text describes and arises from. On the contrary, our unifying thematic preoccupation has been to establish, through all the different directions and sub-explorations we have undertaken, that the discussion of 'worldly' dimensions (as well as questions of interpreting and representing them in narrative) is fundamental to the writing of novels, and thereby to our analysis of them, and that this inclusive capacity is an essential part of what makes them existentially relevant.

Worlds or Textuality: Contrasting Foucault and Derrida.

At the heart of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said's book-length attempt to articulate a criticism that can "travel" "between culture and system" and discuss in free inter-relation issues relating to 'text' and 'world' simultaneously,¹ Said sets up a comparative study of the premises, methods and hermeneutic horizons of Foucault and Derrida as a crystallised exploration of his preoccupations. For Said, there operates "a highly schematic divergence dramatised by the polemical conflict between Derrida and Foucault" (183), in which for the former, "[if] the text is

¹ "For if texts are a form of impressive human activity, they must be correlated with (not reduced to) other forms of impressive, perhaps even repressive, and displacing forms of human activity" (Said, 1991, 225).

important [...] because its real situation is literally a textual element with no ground in actuality, [...] then for Foucault, the text is important because it inhabits an element of power (*pouvoir*) with a decisive claim on actuality, even though that power is invisible or implied" (1991, 183).

Yet after an essay in which he presents at length the epistemologies and interpretative significance of both theoretical positions, Said ultimately acknowledges dissatisfaction with the restrictive implications of either horizon.² On the one hand, he wonders if deconstructionists, for all their (fundamental) affirmations to the contrary, run the danger of becoming "promulgators of a new orthodoxy" (200). But even though he decides that "Derrida has gone to extraordinary lengths to provide his readers (and his students, in France and elsewhere) with a set of counterconcepts" and has been "most careful to say that even his affirmative deconstructive technique is not a programme to replace the old-style philosophic system (209), Said finds that:

It has not, from its unique vantage point, illuminated in sufficient detail, the thing he refers to in his account of the *corps enseignant*, that is the *contrat entre ces corps* (bodies of knowledge, institutions, power), a contract hidden because *jamais exhibe sur le devant de la scene*" (211).

His primary doubt is to do with how "the texts to which this position has been applied by Derrida have also been denied their historical density, specificity and weight":

Derrida's Plato, Rousseau, Mallarme, and Saussure: are all these just texts, or are they a loose order of knowledge from the point of view of a liberal believer in Western culture? [...] What makes it possible for a certain system of metaphysical ideas, as well as a whole structure of concepts, praxes, and ideologies derived from it, to maintain itself from Greek antiquity through the present? What forces keep all these ideas glued together? What forces get them into texts? How does one's thinking become infected, then taken over by those ideas? Are all these things matters of fortuitous coincidence, or is

² An argument we are not able to fully engage with within our present context, just as we are unable to undertake an independent appraisal of either Foucault or Derrida. Yet, even though it is therefore slightly intellectually unjustifiable to say so, we do broadly endorse Said's conclusions on both their positions, and moreover find the distinction very useful to adapt to our own purposes.

there in fact some relevant connection to be made, and seen, between the instances of logocentrism and the agencies perpetuating it in time (211)?

Said's counter is that the 'tradition' thus at work is "an apparatus with power and a lasting historical, actual imprint on human life. But it needs some greater degree of specification than Derrida has given it" (211):

And so in reading Derrida's work we marvel at what keeps the ideas of western metaphysics there in all the texts at night and during the day, for so long a period of time" (211)?

Clearly, Said is not about to exchange a paradigm of "the great literary text" of "self delighting humanism" studied as an "isolated paddock in the broad cultural field" (225), which he refuses entirely, for one which envisions all textuality as being just more opportunity for equal and endless deconstruction. Yet by the end of the essay, he has also rejected a purely Foucauldian position to build upon for his own project of reconsidering the interactive, multivalent relationships between texts and their worlds. Said finds deeply problematic Foucault's insistence on the all-creating, all-consuming absoluteness of an abstraction he terms power: a "theoretical overtotalisation" (242) that is ultimately unhelpful. To assert that "power is everywhere" as he finds the later Foucault to be doing, is "vastly simplified" (244):

Is it not simply wrong [...] to say that power is not *based* anywhere and that struggle and exploitation--- both terms left out of Foucault's analyses--- do not occur? The problem is that Foucault's use of the term *pouvoir* moves around too much, swallowing up every obstacle in its path (resistances to it, the class and economic bases that refresh and fuel it, the reserves it builds up), obliterating change and mystifying its microphysical sovereignty. [...] In fact Foucault's theory of power is a Spinozist conception (245).

Resisting Theory: Said on a 'Critical Consciousness'.

Throughout the book, and especially during this comparative essay that brings out the contrast between two fields of theory when applied to their fullest extent, Said reflects more generally on the constitutive significance of theor(ies), as well as their limits within activities of interpretation:

Theory [...] can never be complete, just as one's interest in everyday life, is never exhausted by simulacra, models, or theoretical abstracts of it. Of course one derives pleasure from actually making evidence fit or work in a theoretical scheme, and of course it is ridiculously foolish to argue that 'the facts' or 'the great texts' do not require any theoretical framework or methodology to be appreciated or read properly. No reading is neutral or innocent, and by the same token every text and reader is to some extent the product of a theoretical standpoint, however implicit or unconscious such a standpoint may be (241).

But it is essential to his articulation of the requirements of a "critical consciousness" to define and then distance himself from any form of theoretical absolutism:

I am arguing, however, that we distinguish theory from critical consciousness by saying that the latter is a sort of spatial sense, a sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory, and this means that theory has to be grasped in the place and the time out of which it emerges as a part of that time, working in and for it, responding to it [...]. The critical consciousness is awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported. [...] Indeed I would go as far as saying that it is the critic's job to provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory (241-242).

The Novel as the Terrain of 'Critical Consciousness'.

In the section appraising Derrida, at one point Said notes "one important thing in his choice of texts. Most are texts in which there is very little [fictional] narrative, or texts that use narrative to illustrate a point [...] [which then] draw Derrida's suspicious attention to the author's elisions and complicities, or [...] to what the author tries to tell and obscure at the same time" (192). Yet, he asks, "what does this avoidance of narrative mean" (192):

Now, unlike other texts, the realistic novel is governed by a different [...] mode of representation. Though it is true of course that many novels use the same device of a storyteller recounting a story to an audience, this device is incorporated into the novel, and is therefore an already admitted fiction. [...] Moreover [...] many modern novels often are themselves about the alternation of writing and speaking--- an alternation that does not favour speech over writing--- and the alternation of presence and absence. The very problematic of textuality is neither eluded nor elided, but made into an explicit intentional and constitutive aspect of the narrative. [...] The point is that these motifs, which are the very ones in a sense constructed by Derrida's criticism, already exist in narrative not as a hidden (hence inadvertent) element but as a principal one. Such texts cannot therefore be deconstructed, since their deconstruction has already been begun self-consciously by the novelist and by the novel. Thus this aspect of narrative poses the challenge, as yet not taken up, of what there is to be done, *after* deconstruction is well under way, after the *idea* of deconstruction no longer represents elaborate intellectual audacity (193). [...] In all this we have two things with which deconstruction as a general interpretative strategy, based on allegedly universal characteristics of western thought, cannot deal: writing as a highly complex *surface* activity and formal element in narrative: two, writing that appears already differentiated from other activities not because of some preordained decision, but as the *consequence* of a historical evolution unique, and yet absolutely crucial, to the narrative form itself (194).

Our argument throughout this study has been that novels are always, already necessarily 'worlded' from *within*, and that therefore it is possible to remain inside a purely 'literary' discussion, and never abandon examining other relevant aspects of human existence simultaneously. It is what we termed 'novelistic criticism' in our introductory section (an interpretative perspective akin to a Bakhtinian conception of "sociological stylistics"), and have attempted to practice subsequently, that we now present as a response to Said's question, about "what there is to be done after "deconstruction is well under way, after the *idea* of deconstruction no longer represents elaborate intellectual audacity" (193). Said makes clear his own underpinnings as a critic:

My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. [...] Each essay in this book [therefore] affirms the connections between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events (1991, 4-5).

There is evidently a crucial difference in our self-positionings. Said defines textual 'worldedness' much more as a matter of the interventionary implications of texts-in-their-worlds, rather than the worlds-within-fictional-texts. Of course such explorations can co-exist without contradiction and complement each other fruitfully and analogously, but the difference in critical location is fundamental. We have argued that fiction is ontologically 'worlded' in its very modes of discussion, and that the apparent dichotomy between text and world is dissolved *within* the novelistic text itself, as much as by the Saidian project of reintroducing the context of the world outside in which it is an ongoing event. We have shown by now that the novel, in Said's words, itself both "commands and indeed permits, invents, all its misrepresentations and misreadings, which are [here] functions of the text" (199), as well as simultaneously operates as "the activation of an immensely complex tissue of social forces" (215). If the former can be seen as fiction's self-deconstructive dimension, then, as we analysed in the case of *The Trial*, it is epistemologically inseparable from the novel's heteroglossic investigations of being-in-the-world, rather than an alternative theoretical option. Moreover, the multivalent comprehensiveness of fictional interrogation in which disparate formal, ideological, theoretical and hermeneutic conflicts are enacted simultaneously--- whereby each position is challenged, filled out, extended, redefined--- might offer precisely the discursive ground upon which to premise the sort of critical 'resistance' to exclusive theorising that Said enunciates. Because not only do novels accommodate disagreeing perspectives, but they are embodied within living characters, socialised, and therefore represented as 'worlded', dynamic, open-ended conflicts. This is why we propose that the novel, uniquely among discourses, can provide performances of the "spatial sense" that Said describes, "for locating or situating theor[ies]" whereby they can be "grasped in the place and the time out of which [they] emerge as a part of that time, working in and for it, responding to it [...]. [A novelised] consciousness is awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no

system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported" (241-242).

And this inter-animating merger, of the 'alternatives' of thoroughly situated and historicised discourse that is *also* polyglossic, formally and hermeneutically self-reflexive, and therefore textually self-deconstructive, can have further dichotomy-dissolving implications. For instance, Lukacs famously accuses Heidegger of an unacceptably 'ahistorical' formulation of 'Being':

I cannot refrain from drawing the reader's attention to Heidegger's description of human existence as a "thrownness-into-being". A more graphic evocation of the ontological solitariness of the individual would be hard to imagine. [...] This implies not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself, but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence.

Man, thus conceived, is an ahistorical being (1995, 190).

Again, it is not within our present scope to debate with Lukacs by considering Heidegger's philosophy in any detail; we merely point out that such a dichotomous critique could not be made regarding the world of a novel, which evokes perspectives upon the fullness of beings immersed in worlds while at the same time always situating them specifically and revealing their life-trajectories to be social, multi-layered and dynamic. Even more, as part of its range of efforts to engage with specific stories and distinct voices, these novels are often re-inscribed formally with a radical flexibility that does not obey any prescriptive injunctions (such as Lukacs's beloved 'critical realism'); nor do these works adhere to any formal-thematic determinism such as Kwame Appiah indicates between 'realist' novels (that supposedly 'promote' nationalism) followed by 'post-realism' that challenges it. And finally we have seen--- in the works of Tolstoy, Rushdie, Bessie Head, Coetzee, and Achebe--- that discursive 'praxis' and meta-fictional meditation are often inextricably correlated within the novel as an integral part of its performance.

Such are the premises upon which we have interpreted the implications of diverse novelistic envisionings, and simultaneously practiced ourselves aspects of the multivalent, 'worlded' criticism Said articulates:

[That would be] always situated, [...] sceptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failings. This is by no means to say that it is value-free. Quite the contrary, for the inevitable trajectory of critical consciousness is to arrive at some acute sense of what political, social and human values are entailed in the reading, production, and transmission of every text. To stand between culture and system is therefore to stand *close to* [...] a concrete reality about which political, moral, and social judgements have to be made, and, if not only made, then exposed and demystified (1991, 26).

Only, as with Bakhtin, we found ample opportunity for such criticism within the worlds opened up by novels.

The Extent of Novelistic Engagement with Post-Colonial National Life.

The novels examined in the course of this study do not dismiss national frameworks or nationalist discourses *a priori* as being either anachronistic or atavistic, as has been fashionable in so many intellectual quarters; nor do they homogenise disparate versions and phases of post-colonial nationalism and collapse them under the same critical categories. On the other hand they do not succumb to the temptations of partisan 'nativism', the dangers of which critics such as Said, Fanon and Bhabha have outlined. Thus, such narratives fail to provide many instances of the homogenising 'sociological solidity' that Anderson describes as their crucial function in fashioning "imagined communities". Nor did we find them to be anywhere near as ideologically coercive, conformist, or monologically reducible to the interests of a nationalist elite such as Said suggests, for instance, as being true of *all* English novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further, we have argued that post-colonial fictions perform diversely and repeatedly the potential project of inscribing voices, social locations and individual or communal trajectories that remain irreducible to the categories of any nationalist horizon--- historiographic heterogeneity such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Spivak, Said, Bhabha, and the subaltern

historians discretely envision--- while at the same time engaging thoroughly with the implications of inhabiting nationally framed societies and their hegemonic discourses. Such re-inscription--- and the related issues that emerge (such as that of belonging to the class with the privilege of interpreting and representing)--- inevitably implies a high degree of hermeneutic self-scrutiny. But when such questions are themselves embodied within novels and performed to the point of crisis, their resonances are explored simultaneously in their socio-political and structural origins and inevitably lead on to discussions of the material *and* interpretative implications of inhabiting the nation-state at various levels, as well as possibilities of resistance and redefinition (as opposed to being restricted merely to discussions of textual surfaces).

A Refusal to 'Conclude'.

Throughout the course of this study, we have made subjective, fluid, and mobile connections between themes, theories and texts set far apart in time and space, believing such a practice to be possible and useful, but it is the refusal to add another horizon (to historiographies, narrative forms, or theoretical interpretations) to the vast number already available, that keeps us from summarising--- and therefore arresting, essentialising and/or homogenising--- our discussions into any overarching formulations of either 'post-colonial nationhood' or the workings of its narratives. It is 'novelism' itself that cautions us against any final statements by reminding us of the fullness of human existence as well as its own expressive limits each time it initiates another attempt at narrative--- again inevitably particular and bounded, inevitably just another fiction. Besides, not only are we reluctant to perform such subsuming, but the extent of comparative historical and literary analysis (including fictions from other places and phases of world history) required to convincingly establish any such formulations is well beyond the scope of this study. Yet we should clarify that each separate discursive framework undoubtedly has its hermeneutic and

political utility, and that we emphatically do not wish to revert to an advocacy of 'free-for-all' interpreting, where no approach has any more validity than another. The sheer thematic range, depth and detail of engagement that we have demonstrated on behalf of novelistic discourse should secure us against such accusations of 'cosmopolitan' irresponsibility. But if our objective really is, as Radhakrishnan has formulated about 'feminist historiography', "not to set up a different and oppositional form of totality, but to establish a different relationship to totality" (Castle, 2001, 193-194), we remain content to have illustrated our primary thesis: that of fiction being a uniquely flexible, 'worlded', and multivalent mode of discursive interrogation. Even if the novel is inherited from the same phases of Western history that produced the nation-state, these novelists have done much more than 'derivatively' reproduce what Chakrabarty worries is the "everyday subalternity of non-Western histories" (Mongia, 1996, 240). To adapt a term of Chakrabarty's, they have "provincialised" this medium repeatedly and diversely, and have cumulatively performed a singularly demanding demonstration (and confirmation) of the dialogic, re-inscriptive elasticity possible within fictional narrative.

Do Nations Learn from their Novels?

In the first chapter of our second section, we promised to return to Timothy Brennan's hypothesis as to whether the performative, heteroglossic, experimental qualities of the novel can themselves operate as a manner of nationalist pedagogy. To recapitulate, Brennan's synthesis brings Anderson and Bhabha together: to him, the novel is pedagogic *because* of being "performative" in its unique Bakhtinian way. By embodying and performing "a hodgepodge of the ostensibly separate 'levels of style' corresponding to class; a jumble of poetry, drama, newspaper report, memoir and speech; a mixture of the jargons of race and ethnicity" (1989, 10), Brennan argues that fiction demonstrates to the diverse members of the nation that if they can be shown to co-exist interactively within one textual narrative, perhaps they could

inhabit history together as well under the framework of a single nation. He thus redirects the implications of the novel's capacity for heteroglossia from the text back into the world it arises from, in proposing that such narrative demonstration "implicitly" answered for Europe how she was to prevent a "continual, chaotic splintering" of former empires and papal realms, by "objectifying" in its very form "the nation's composite nature" (10). Further, in the novel's hands 'tradition' becomes an "useable past", "and the evocation of deep, sacred origins---instead of furthering unquestioning, ritualistic affirmations of a people (as in epic)---becomes a contemporary, practical means of creating a people" (9).

So, can the non-monologic, non-pedagogic novel be the blueprint and the embodiment of a post-colonial "longing for form"? On the one hand, we have Leela Gandhi's stern reminder that it would be a superficial and impoverishing reversion into a tradition of textual/aesthetic valorisation encompassing Romantic, New Critical and even post-structuralist tendencies "that starts to treat the [novelistic] text as an end in itself, or as an improvement upon the hopeless inadequacies of political realities" (1998, 157).³ But even more we realise that a study that has insistently focused on the worlds *within* texts, cannot suddenly turn in its last paragraph to Saidian questions of its implications in the outside world, and measure the ways in which such events have been interventions in national histories. Furthermore, we have studied only fictional representations, not histories or sociologies, of post-colonial nations, which allows us therefore to conclude legitimately only about the workings of novels, rather than the directions of actual histories. That is clearly the subject for (numerous) other alternatively premised and directed studies.⁴ We simply

³ See Gandhi (1998, 157-162) for a fuller critique.

⁴ It must be clarified that we are not for a moment refuting such work or ignoring its possible importance, only confessing to lack the resources within our research for either conducting any such historiographies or pronouncing such verdicts. See Barbara Harlow's book on *Resistance Literature* (1987) as an instance of such analysis, in how she conflates historical, political, autobiographical and

do not know enough about the conditions of production and consumption of the novels we have examined in the actual societies they were written in; whether there are any ways of calibrating their social influence, and how such radically re-interpretable texts (all moreover in the English-language) can “teach” (or even reach) entire societies or nations.

Explicitly coming out against any Lukacsian claims of achieving ‘objective totalities’, Rushdie, just to cite one instance among novelists, has also argued the thoroughly ‘worlded’, heteroglossic capacities of the novel, while simultaneously insisting on its complete de-sanctification as an item of knowledge or ‘pedagogic’ authority, except for the simple right to exist and participate freely in ‘worldly’ conversation:

The novel has always been *about* the way in which different languages, values, and narratives quarrel, and about the shifting relations between them which are relations of power. The novel does not seek to establish a privileged language, but it insists upon the freedom to portray and analyse the struggle between the different contestants for such privileges.

Carlos Fuentes has called the novel a ‘privileged arena’. By this he does not mean that it is the kind of holy space which one must put off one’s shoes to enter; it is not an arena to revere; it claims no special rights *except the right to be the stage upon which the great debates of society can be conducted* (1992, 420). [...] Literature is an interim report from the consciousness of the artist, and so it can never be ‘finished’ or ‘perfected’ [...]. Nothing so inexact, so easily and frequently misconceived, deserves the protection of being declared sacrosanct (427).

Ultimately, it is just the novel’s ever-limited, yet ever-renewable capacity to evoke some of the conflicting voices and multiple dimensions of our ‘worldedness’ whose discursive value we are upholding: its unique ability to dissolve dichotomies---

literary examination and reads not just texts, but also their actual revolutionary implications within their societies; or Said’s own criticism that often links the work done by novelists and intellectuals towards the wider cause of ‘social liberation’, especially in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Neil Lazarus is another critic who has written frequently of the ‘worlded’ role of intellectuals and the significance of their work within post-colonial societies in helping fashion “a *genuinely* postcolonial strategy”, a “‘new’ humanism predicated upon a formal repudiation of the degraded European form, and borne embryonically in the national liberation movement”, that would then attempt “to construct a standpoint--- socialist, nationalitarian, liberationist, internationalist--- from which it is possible to assume the burden of speaking for all humanity” (1999, 143). See also (Barker et al, 1994, 197-220).

between worlds and works, the textual and the existential, between being full yet never being final.

Bibliography.

This bibliography is divided into three sections. The second and third sections comprise the primary and critical/theoretical/historical texts respectively that have either been cited within the body of my work, or have made a direct thematic impact upon it. The first section however is based on slightly different principles. Besides the texts I actually examined, it took me the reading of a significant quantity of fiction that seemed 'relevant' (i.e. nationally engaged and comprehensively 'worlded') from different periods and places, before I could emerge with the interpretative premises underlying this study. This was part of an effort not only to understand something of the diversity of perspectives and formal strategies different novelists over the last three centuries have employed in undertaking such interrogation, but also to derive my own critical methods from the nature(s) of fictional discourse itself, from the actual practice of reading it. Also, reading a number of African, Caribbean (and Latin American) novels was specifically directed towards assessing if there were any particular and broadly comparable narrative preoccupations and features that could be characterised as unique to 'post-colonial' fictionalising.

Perhaps such eclectic reading was inevitable given a study that chose as its protagonist the capacities and processes of fiction itself, and then ranged in its explorations over work from two continents. This first section therefore is a selective list of some of the texts that would (of course) have been impossible to analyse in detail within the limits of this thesis, but were (invisibly) indispensable nevertheless-- individually and cumulatively--- in the groundwork upholding various aspects of my study.

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